

PRAXIS II: Concepts & Processes
Sample Choral Ensemble Essay Questions & Tips

The ensemble essay question is typically listed first on the Concepts and Processes test and the test taker (you!) chooses between the instrumental and the choral question. You should give yourself 30 minutes to answer the question, and you will be asked to demonstrate an understanding of performance techniques by providing remedial techniques in performance or in an ensemble rehearsal.

Overview of Concepts that are being assessed on the exam

Developmental sequence of vocal development:

Tone quality

Diction

Proper breathing

Posture

Be able to diagnose why the entire ensemble cannot execute a musical concepts such as:

Poor tone quality

Poor intonation

Lack of balance or blend

The changing voice (specifically with men in middle school)

Be able to suggest possible solutions and remedial techniques for the above arease (at least three problems and solutions for each problem).

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

• TOPIC B: CHORAL

- A middle school choral teacher wants her beginning mixed choir to sing in four parts. However, too many students are unable to maintain singing independence when singing octavo music. The students can sing in unison with about 90% accuracy, however.
- Briefly describe three techniques the teacher can use to develop vocal independence in her students leading to SATB singing.
- List three remediation factors, too, that will encourage more accuracy in singing in unison.

TIPS FOR ANSWERING

- Read the question to determine what the students can and cannot do: *sing in unison, mostly; not sing in harmony*. From here you can detail the developmental sequence
- Describe a developmental sequence from unison singing to part singing:
 - Teach students a melody with a simple ostinato
 - Once students can consistently maintain singing two to three ostinati with a song; teach students two melodies that can be combined as a partner song.
 - Step three: teach the students a canon that can be sung in two, three, or four parts.
 - *For the above steps, suggest literature and detail how each technique builds vocal independence.*

- Three remedial techniques for singing in unison: (1) keep men/boys together and test voices often to see who may be in vocal change; (2) individual testing and extra help; (3) sing “known” literature to students to create a sound base of what singing in-tune/unison is. Other remedial techniques would be singing literature in a limited range, or attending to tone production fundamentals such as posture, breath support, pitch matching, etc.

Sample question 1:

A beginning high school choir is flattening in a chromatic section of an *a cappella* piece that lies in a high tessitura for all voices. The singers have learned the notes correctly, but the flattening persists.

1. Identify and briefly describe THREE possible causes of this flattening.
2. Briefly describe ONE specific remedial technique that can be used to correct each of the problems identified.
3. Tips to answering: causes of flattening—breath support problems, posture, incorrect vowel formations. Remediate each of these to help answer question. Also, since it lies in a high tessitura, you may choose to take the part down an octave to rehearse with proper technique. Write the full essay with these or other causes/remediations.

Sample question 3:

The high school mixed choir is having difficulty creating an even crescendo in a piece. List three causes and list three remedial techniques to assist students in developing the crescendo. *Tip: Describe specific rehearsal techniques that can assist the students in producing an even crescendo in the music. Be specific with your answers. Almost invariably this is a question of breath management and breath speed). How can you fix this, and what other causes may be interfering with the choir to produce the desired crescendo? Change question’s problem to the concept of diminuendo.*

Sample question 4:

A beginning mixed choir has problems with producing a consistent balance and blend when singing a piece of literature. The students have learned the notes and text for the piece, but the balance and blend are unpleasant. List three causes for this lack of balance and blend, and what can be done for each cause to produce a better sound from the choir. *Tips: Balance has to do with overpowering parts or a particular part is more present than another. Blend has to do with how the entire choir sounds as one voice, for example. Blend can be accomplished by having the choir sing the piece or a section of the piece on a neutral vowel that creates a uniformity of sound. Have the choir sing through the space of that vowel when the actual text is sung (this needs more detail, but the basic outline is listed for you). Balance can be a factor of adjusting the dynamic levels of a particular part(s). For example, if the score indicates a “forte” for all parts with the melody in the alto section, ask the sopranos, tenors, and basses to sing “mezzo piano or piano” for the section that the altos have the melody. What else can be the cause and how can you describe a teaching process to elicit the desired sound from the choir?*