

***PRAXIS II: Concepts & Processes***  
***Sample Instrumental 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 learning to play an instrument: (all families)

*Tone quality*

*Embouchure*

*Proper breathing*

*Posture*

*Playing position*

*Articulation*

*Stick grip*

Be familiar with common problems students have in producing sound on his or her instrument.

Be able to diagnose (and remediate) why the entire ensemble cannot execute a musical concept.

Be able to suggest possible solutions and remedial techniques: (at least three problems and solutions for each problem)

*Poor tone quality*

*Poor intonation*

*Lack of balance*

*Lack of blend*

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

- TOPIC A: Instrumental
  - Choose ONE of the following woodwind instruments: flute, oboe, B-flat clarinet, bassoon, alto saxophone
  - For the instrument you have chosen, identify and describe THREE possible causes of *poor tone quality*. Choose a *specific* instrument and write your choice in the space provided.
  - Briefly describe ONE specific remedial technique that can be used to correct *each* of the problems you identify.

## TIPS FOR ANSWERING

- List what you think is causing the problem
  - Cause 1
  - Cause 2
  - Cause 3
- Describe a procedure to remediate each cause
  - Remediate cause 1
  - Remediate cause 2
  - Remediate cause 3

**Be Specific with Remedial Techniques!!!**

- **True, but weak (instrumental-woodwind)**: Students have poor breath support; remind them to breathe deeply.
- **Better**: Have students inhale slowly over eight counts with their hands on their lower abdomen to feel the expansion of their lungs as they inhale. Have them exhale over eight counts as if they are blowing out a birthday candle (fast steady air flow). Repeat this process 3 times increasing to 12 and then to 16 counts in 4/4 time.
- Have students repeat this exercise while playing a single pitch in a comfortable range.
- Transfer this skill to a 4-measure melody or pitch pattern.
- Transfer to a 4-measure phrase in student's music (part).
- Assess and reinforce, as needed.

### ***Sample question 1:***

From the model above, replace the family of instruments to include the brass and strings (tone production).

### ***Sample question 2:***

Describe an instructional sequence that includes three different approaches for teaching students snare drum fundamentals: specifically, various-stroke rolls, flam, and paradiddles. Which problems may be encountered by the student in learning these strokes, and what can the teacher do to provide remedial techniques to combat them? *List the problems that each stroke can cause when learning, suggest a remedial technique for each problem, in other words. Do not forget to discuss how to go about teaching the stroke requested, first, as this may combat the problem proactively.*

### ***Sample question 3:***

The concert band 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 (although with string and percussion instruments it may be a question of pressure and strength upon the instrument). Another technique is to assign a number system to create crescendo (1 is softest to 8 being the highest). How would you teach these various concepts in a sequential manner?*