



# The Do's and Don'ts of Sight-Reading at Festival

Clinicians: Karl Fitch and John Vorwald

## Why Sight-Reading is Important

Sight-reading is the process of reading and performing a work of music without having seen it before. It is considered a useful and important skill for musicians. Sight-reading depends on familiarity with the musical idiom performed; this permits the reader to recognize and perform whole patterns at once, rather than individual notes, thus achieving greater efficiency. Errors in sight-reading tend to occur in places where the music contains unexpected or unusual sequences; these defeat the strategy of "reading by expectation" the sight readers usually employ. Sight-reading can be very enjoyable for you and your students and definitely will improve their music reading ability and shorten rehearsal time.

## Prior to Festival –Laying a foundation

Sight-reading should take place in some form throughout the year. Each time a new piece is introduced, read all or part of it as if you were in the sight-reading room using the *Do's and Don'ts* to follow. Include a sight-reading activity as part of the warm-up routine each day. Just a verbal explanation is not good enough; you must go through the process with the students so they will be calm and confident at festival. Here are some tips to help lay a good foundation:

- Teach scales.
- Use method books which drill rhythms and rests in short exercises.
- Use a system for counting subdivisions, and have the students count all exercises in syllables while fingering the notes on their instruments.
- Use chorales to help teach phrasing.

## How to Sight Read

- Practice  
Students must practice sight-reading. (See: *Prior to Festival—Laying a foundation*)

- Verbal systems  
Below are three verbal sight-reading systems that work for some teachers.  
This is the order used by some of these teachers teaching sight-reading:

### 1) STARS

**S** = Key signature  
**T** = Tempo  
**A** = Accidentals  
**R** = Rhythms/repeats  
**S** = Style

### 2) PKRSD

**P** = Pulse  
**K** = Key signature  
**R** = Rhythms  
**S** = Style  
**D** = Dynamics

### 3) TKTTRS

**T** = Title  
**K** = Key signature  
**T** = Time signature  
**T** = Tempo  
**R** = Road map  
**S** = Stylistic markings

## SCSBOA Sight-Reading Guidelines and Procedure

- 1-Students enter the Sight-Reading room in a disciplined and orderly manner.
- 2-Students adjust their seating arrangement to "fit into the room," setting up as you normally do in your room. Be sure percussionists know which students will play the major parts.
- 3-Students place their music under their chair.
- 4-The adjudicator will give instructions to the students about sight-reading and what is intended to be accomplished.
- 5-The room assistants will pass out the sight-reading folders. The students are NOT to open the folders but are expected to confirm that they have received the correct folder for their instrument.
- 6-The adjudicator will make any adjustments in folders at this time.
- 7-The adjudicator will issue these instructions:  
*Please open your folders and remove (music selection). Is this the correct part in the folder for your instrument? Are there any problems?*
- 8-The adjudicator will hand the conductor the score at this time.  
The conductor will have four (4) minutes to study the score and instruct the group.  
*Use all the time!* The adjudicator will tell you when time is up.

### During the four minutes of review

Study the score for approximately 30 seconds. The students may study their individual parts on their own during this time. Determine which method of sight-reading preparation to use for the remainder of the four minutes. Here are some suggestions:

- Have the students count the sub-division of their part for the entire 3 or 4 minutes.
- Isolate sections of the music for counting sub-divisions.
- Discuss the music from beginning to end and have the students follow using the touch method.
- You might ask the students to finger the scale(s) belonging to the piece.
- Avoid emphasizing accidentals. It's the sustained alteration of the note in the same measure that tends to confuse the players. This is a habit that needs to be instilled during year.

During the next three and a half minutes make sure to follow these guidelines:

#### **What the director MAY do:**

Talk about the piece.

- ☺ Point out the key signatures
- ☺ Review time signatures
- ☺ Provide any pertinent information that will give the students their best chance to sight-read the piece successfully.

You are allowed to call-out rehearsal letters or bar numbers without penalty.

**What the director MAY NOT do:**

Perform the piece or phrase.

- ⊗ Sing
- ⊗ Tap
- ⊗ Count
- ⊗ Do anything other than use descriptive phrases
- ⊗ Mark the score

**What the students MAY do:**

Practice a difficult rhythm

- ☺ Count
- ☺ Clap
- ☺ Tap
- ☺ Sing any part of the work
- ☺ Play the rhythms on a monotone pitch

Play a scale associated with the sight-reading music.

This helps to solidify the key signature.

**What the students MAY NOT do:**

*The students may not play the sight-reading music during the four-minute preparation time.*

Make any marks on the music.

## FAQ

**Q.** Can I use note names or fingerings during the four-minute preparation period?

*A. Yes, you may use notes names and/or fingerings for the purpose of defining key signatures, accidentals or other technical concerns.*

**Q.** Can I conduct rhythmic figures during the preparation period?

*A. Yes, there are no limitations as to what the director can communicate through the use of conducting.*

**Q.** Do I have to use all of the preparation period?

*A. No, a director is not required to use all of the allotted time. The director may proceed to perform the music at any time.*

9-Begin reading the piece. The director may not visually or orally indicate tempo. A preparatory beat may be used.

10-After you have read the piece, the adjudicator will begin pointing out the positive points of the reading and maybe a concern or two that happened during the reading. THIS SHOULD BE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE.

11-The adjudicator will ask the students to place the piece back in the folder, close the folder and pass the folders to the room assistants. After all the folders have been collected, and checked, the adjudicator will release the band to the director for dismissal. *Be sure to collect your music under your chairs. Have the students leave in an orderly manor.*

12-The adjudicator will complete the adjudication sheet.



Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association

**Festival Sight-Reading Adjudication Form**

**BAND**

**ORCHESTRA**

**STRING ORCHESTRA**

SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_ CLASSIFICATION: \_\_\_\_\_

MUSIC READ: \_\_\_\_\_ COMPOSER: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>ACCURACY OF RHYTHM</b> Rhythmic Figures read correctly <input type="checkbox"/> Meter and Tempo changes <input type="checkbox"/> Note values <input type="checkbox"/>	Grade	COMMENTS
<b>ACCURACY OF NOTES</b> Correct Key Signature <input type="checkbox"/> Accidentals <input type="checkbox"/> Correct Pitches <input type="checkbox"/>	Grade	COMMENTS
<b>ACCURACY OF STYLISTIC DETAILS</b> Dynamics <input type="checkbox"/> Articulation <input type="checkbox"/> Bowings <input type="checkbox"/> Tempi <input type="checkbox"/> Nuance <input type="checkbox"/> Phrasing <input type="checkbox"/>	Grade	COMMENTS
<b>RESPONSE TO FELLOW PLAYERS</b> Adjusting for Intonation <input type="checkbox"/> Blend <input type="checkbox"/> Balance <input type="checkbox"/> Rhythmic Precision <input type="checkbox"/> Playing together <input type="checkbox"/>	Grade	COMMENTS
<b>RESPONSE TO CONDUCTOR</b> Following Tempo and Style gestures <input type="checkbox"/> Recovery from errors <input type="checkbox"/>	Grade	COMMENTS
<b>DEPORTMENT – DISCIPLINE</b> Entrance <input type="checkbox"/> Posture <input type="checkbox"/> Alertness <input type="checkbox"/> Attention to Adjudicator <input type="checkbox"/> Attention to Director <input type="checkbox"/> Exit <input type="checkbox"/>	Grade	COMMENTS

(GENERAL COMMENTS – ADJUDICATOR MAY USE BACK IF NEEDED)

Adjudicator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**FINAL RATING:** (Circle One)

Superior

Excellent

Good

Fair

Poor

