

Assessment and Grading in the Ensemble Classroom

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Scott A. Jones, PhD • Professor • The Ohio State University • jones.4371@osu.edu

I. Setting the Stage and Disclaimers

Very few of us were adequately prepared to evaluate learning upon entering the profession. Most of us find a system that “works” for us, and then cling to - it unless compelled to change. Grading is highly “emotionally-charged” for the majority of students, parents, and teachers. Large ensemble performance often complicates grading. If we desire music to be viewed as essential to an education, we must have the capacity to accurately communicate learning that takes place while a student is in our care.

II. Key Questions

What is the difference between assessment and evaluation?
What should a grade at the end of a marking period communicate?
How do we balance instrument-specific development, performance preparation, and the broader education in music when evaluating learning?
How is student compliance with behavioral/cultural expectations best communicated?
What do valuable measurements of student understanding look like in the large ensemble?
What role should the student play in evaluating their own learning in the large ensemble?

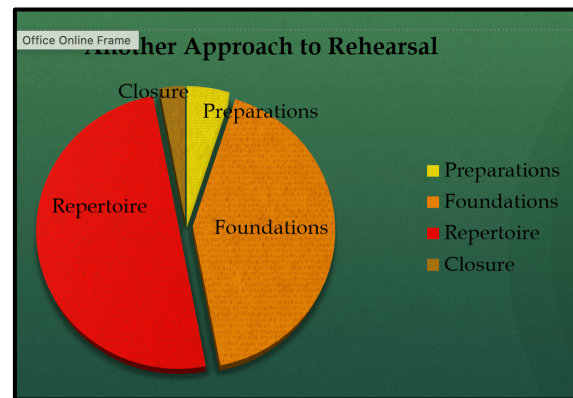
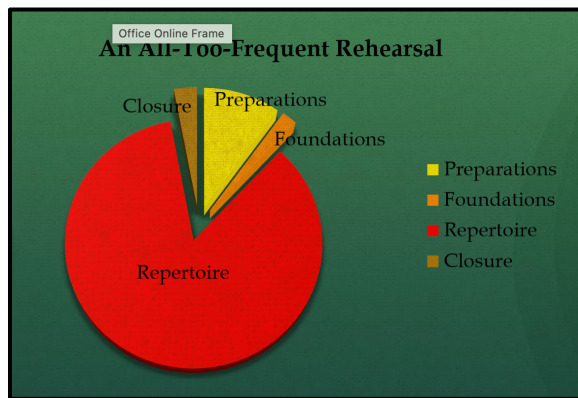
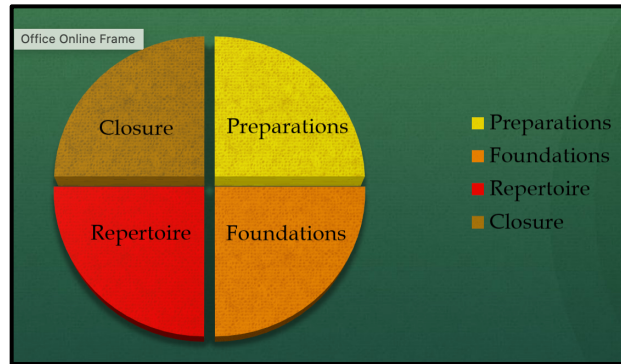
III. Three Areas of Development for the Ensemble Musician

- a. Classroom cultural and behavioral expectations, such as:
 - Coming to class with all materials
 - Being punctual and attentive
 - Honoring cultural expectations for daily rehearsal preparations and closure
 - Being respectful, kind, and supportive of peers
 - Caring for instruments and equipment

- b. Foundational skill development and achievement, such as:
 - Tone quality
 - Rhythmic skills
 - Intonational skills
 - Stylistic skills
 - Expressive skills
 - Theory-specific skills

- c. Repertoire-specific understanding and achievement, such as:
 - Compositional structures (form, structures, themes, motives, etc.)
 - Compositional message/spirit
 - Historically-specific information
 - Composer-specific information
 - Societal/global connections

IV. How We Spend Our Time: Rehearsal Segment Proportion



V. To Stimulate Thought (pp. 4-8)

Classroom Cultural/Behavioral Expectations

“The First Moments of Rehearsal”

Foundational Skill Development

“Pitch Bending Exercise”

Repertoire-specific Understanding

“Getting to Know the Imani Winds”

“Composer Steve Danyew and *Into the Silent Land*”

VI. Expectations vs. Achievement

Much of the research on best practices in evaluating learning indicates that grades should only include information related to student achievement.

“Don’t include student behaviors (effort, participation, adherence to class rules, etc.) in grades; include only achievement.”

“Don’t consider attendance in grade determination; report absences separately.”

- Ken O’Connor, *A Repair Kit for Grading*

VII. About Performances

- How much individual achievement is measurable during a performance?
- Viewing performance as “a display” of what students have collectively learned versus an evaluation of individual learning.
- Viewing performance as a “privilege” and not a “right.”
- What ways to evaluate individual achievement related to performance?

VIII. The Transformative Nature of Rubrics and Self-Evaluation

The inclusion of a scoring/evaluation rubric clearly communicates expectations to the student, and also makes it possible for the student to complete a self-evaluation as part of their submission. When a self-evaluation is required as part of the assignment, the quality of the submission benefits as well as the long-term understanding and development of the student.

IX. Concluding Thoughts

“The majority of students would like to learn a lot *and* have good grades. However, students face more pressure to get good grades than to master content, grow as a person, be inquisitive, and discover what makes them happy. If the only route to the honor roll involves understanding, completeness, original thought, and exemplary performance, those are the things that students playing either game will do. Students only play ‘the grading game’ [vs. ‘the learning game’] when school allows or encourages them to [do so].”

- Brian Shaw, *Music Assessment for Better Ensembles*

“The journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step.” - Lao Tzu

X. Resources

Duke, Robert. *Intelligent Music Teaching: Essays on the Core Principles of Instruction*. Austin, TX; Learning and Behavior Resources, 2007.

Farrell, Susan R. *Tools for Powerful Student Evaluation*. Chicago, IL; Meredith Music Publications, 2000.

O’Connor, Ken. *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*. Boston, MA; Pearson Education, Inc., 2011.

O’Toole, Patricia. *Shaping Sound Musicians: An Innovative Approach to Teaching Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance*. Chicago, IL; GIA, 2003.

Shaw, Brian P. *Music Assessment for Better Ensembles*. New York, NY; Oxford University Press, 2018.

Sindberg, Laura K. *Just Good Teaching: Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) in Theory and Practice*. Lanham, MD; Rowan and Littlefield Education, 2012.

“The First Moments of Ensemble Rehearsal in MS/HS Band”

I. BEFORE REHEARSAL BEGINS - INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIORS

GOAL: No matter when a student arrives in relation to the start of rehearsal, they are aware of cultural/communal expectations for specific behaviors (social and musical).

Wind Musicians

1. Be seated with your instrument and folder.
2. Put music/materials in order (see rehearsal plan on whiteboard)
3. Begin your individual warm-up and continue until full rehearsal begins.

Percussion Musicians

1. Get your folder from the folder cabinet.
2. Assist in getting all covers removed and properly stored from all mallet instruments and timpani, and mallet bags from percussion cabinet.
3. Assist in setting up snare/field drums, tom-toms, and accessory percussion equipment needed for the entire rehearsal (refer to rehearsal order on whiteboard).
4. Put music/materials in order (see rehearsal plan on whiteboard).
5. Begin your individual warm-up on mallet instruments only using softer keyboard mallets and continue until full rehearsal begins.

Educator Musicians

1. Be present in the rehearsal room and overtly visible/engaged with the overall environment (and the students who inhabit it).
2. Reinforce appropriate behaviors with praise (especially students who you are slowly “reeling into the boat.”)
3. Redirect inappropriate behaviors as necessary.
4. Be engaged with the quality of the sounds in the rehearsal room.

The “cacophony” resulting from 70 musicians engaged in mature individualized warm-up, and that of 70 musicians engaged in immature individualized warm-up has very different timbres, colors, and densities.

Individual Warm up Sheets

These warm-up sheets - customized for each instrument in the ensemble - contain specific, appropriate, and musically rich activities for the first moments of playing (both at school and at home). Include material that would take no more than 5-7 minutes to complete, but also include the “essentials” of outstanding musicianship.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Symphonic Band Pitch Bending Assignment

The ability to intentionally manipulate any sounded musical tone is foundational to refined musical ensemble playing in the Western Art Music tradition. The tenets of *Just Intonation* require the manipulation of individual musical tones in order to achieve the “pure” or “beatless” sonorities that are the hallmarks of this particular tuning system. On the ensuing page is a chart that details twenty commonly encountered chords and how far sharp or flat (in “cents”) individual members of must be altered to achieve these “pure” sonorities. As you will no doubt glean from study of the chart, without the ability to lower or raise any given musical tone, a musician lacks the ability to accurately play chords of any type “in tune” according to the tenets of *Just Intonation*.

Not only do mature musicians continually manipulate the notes they play in an ensemble setting, they actually *anticipate* the placement of the notes prior to their sounding. Therefore, the ability to play consistently “in tune” actually requires two separate and related skills – one of **production** (pitch production and manipulation) and another of **perception** (a refined sense of musical tonality and “inner hearing”).

This particular exercise is focused on *production* skill. To aid in the development in this important skill, the following exercise will be mastered by all winds within the Symphonic Band.

1. Using a tuner, tune your instrument as you normally do, making any necessary adjustments to your tuning slide, barrel, head joint, etc. This is the only physical tuning adjustment you are to make to your instrument during the exercise.
2. On a note of your choosing, play the note “in tune” (e.g. “0” on the tuner). Without stopping the sound, gradually manipulate the tone to “25 cents” flat. Hold the pitch there momentarily, and then manipulate it back to “0”. The entire trial (0 to -25 to 0) is to happen in one breath.
3. Repeat the process, except this time manipulating the same tone to “15 cents” sharp, holding it momentarily, and then returning to “0”. Again, the entire trial (0 to +15 to 0) is to happen in one breath.

Note: While some adjustments for pitch can be made with alternate fingerings/positions, pitch manipulation for this exercise is to be made with the embouchure. Trombonists are to execute this exercise without altering the slide position.

The **goals** of the exercise are several-fold:

TONAL FLEXIBILITY - As the attached chart indicates, it is essential to have the ability to manipulate a musical tone at least as far as 25 cents flat and 15 cents sharp.

CONTROL – Rather than thinking of the numbers (-25 and +15) as being most important in each trial, the control of the movement of the pitch is actually just as important. Strive for steady and intentional control of the tuner needle as you manipulate the note.

TONAL CONSISTENCY – As individual tones are manipulated flat and sharp, the quality of the musical tone must remain rich and mature. Focus your energies on performing an entire trial with no change in the quality of musical tone on your instrument. While somewhat counterintuitive, manipulating pitch in the *flat* direction most often requires an *increase* in airflow.

Chords of Just Intonation

All chords are based on the root "C" which is "0" pitch

Maj	m	dim	aug
6th	m6	dim (b6)	7th
Maj7	m7	7 (#5)	dim7
m7 (b5)	7 (b5)	mMaj7	Maj7 (#5)
dimMaj7	9th	7 (b9)	Maj9

“Getting to Know the Imani Winds”

Watch **this 4-minute video** - the "trailer" for the Grammy Award-nominated recording "Bruits" by the **Imani Winds** - and respond to the following prompts:

PROMPTS 1 and 2: This video provides a glimpse into the Imani Winds, and specifically important decisions they made as the recording "Bruits" was created. What are 2 dimensions of this recording project that you find compelling as you view the video? Clarify why it is that each dimension you identify is compelling to you.

Visit the **Media page** on the Imani Winds website and watch the 4-minute video performance of the composition by **Jason Moran: Cane mvt. IV- "Natchitoches to New York"** (second row of videos, first on the lefthand side of the page). After listening, respond to the following prompts:

PROMPT 3: In your own words, how would you describe the "spirit" of this composition to a friend or roommate who is not a musician?

PROMPTS 4 and 5: As you watch/listen this video of the Imani Winds performing, identify 2 dimensions of their performance that you find compelling? Clarify why it is that you find each compelling.

Questions should be directed to Dr. Jones.

GRADING RUBRIC

4 pts. - The response deeply addresses each of the components of the prompt/question. The writing reflects exceptional maturity of thought, composition/craft, and grammar. There is compelling evidence that the response is the result of exceptional engagement with the spirit of the prompt/question.

3 pts. - The response addresses each of the components of the prompt/question. The writing reflects maturity of thought, composition/craft, and grammar. There is evidence that the response is the result of strong engagement with the spirit of the prompt/question.

2 pts. - The response somewhat addresses each of the components of the prompt/question. The writing reflects moderately mature thought, composition/craft, and/or grammar. There is limited evidence that the response is the result of strong engagement with the spirit of the prompt/question.

1 pt. - The response does not address one or more of the components of the prompt/question. The writing lacks maturity of thought, composition/craft, and/or grammar. There is little/no evidence that the response is the result of strong engagement with the spirit of the prompt/question.

“ Composer Steve Danyew and *Into the Silent Land* ”

COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY

PROMPT 1: Read **Steve Danyew's biography** and identify two items from it that "stand out" to you. Be sure to include what it is about the two items you identify that causes them to be so for you.

VIDEO CONVERSATION

Composer Steve Danyew was kind enough to give an hour of his time recently to talk about his education, career, and the composition "Into the Silent Land." Video of the conversation can viewed [here](#).

PART 1 - Upbringing, Education, and Career Discernment [0:00-22:00] - OPTIONAL

Upbringing • Undergraduate education at the University of Miami (FL) • Deciding to become a composer • Post undergraduate "gap years" • Diversification • Graduate study in composition at the Eastman School of Music (NY)

PART 2 - Life as a Working Composer [22:00-32:45] - OPTIONAL

Life as a working composer • The first 15 years as a composer • Income streams • Persistence and resilience • 20% / 80% concept

PART 3 - "Into the Silent Land" [32:45-64:45] - REQUIRED

Connection to Sandy Hook, CT • Where/how to start? • Inspiration and essence of the piece • Ending the composition • Is this piece "good enough?" • Abide with Me • Poetry and decisions • Parting thoughts

PROMPT 2: In this portion of the conversation, Mr. Danyew shares detailed information about his connection to Sandy Hook Elementary School. What are the connections he shares?

PROMPT 3: How much time passed after the 2012 tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary before Mr. Danyew began writing this piece?

PROMPT 4: Between 35:00 and 37:00 Mr. Danyew shares some important information about the struggle to begin to compose this work. In your own words, summarize his comments and challenges this part of the process included.

PROMPT 5: As well, Mr. Danyew describes "the essence of what the piece would be about" in that same portion of the conversation. Summarize that "essence" in your own words.

PROMPT 6: What are the two musical ideas that Mr. Danyew decided to use for the beginning of the composition that he shares in this part of the conversation?

PROMPT 7: Between 42:15 and 45:30 Mr. Danyew shares with great transparency concerns about the endeavor of writing a piece connected to the 2012 tragedy. Summarize his concerns in your own words.

PROMPT 8: Share your reactions to the issues raised in the previous prompt. What surprised you or stood out to you about this part of the conversation?

PROMPT 9: Mr. Danyew shares how the idea to use "Abide with Me" came to be during the compositional process. What was it that inspired him to use that particular tune?

PROMPT 10: Between 53:00 and 55:00, Mr. Danyew shares the process of making decisions related to the poem. He then poses the question "Is it fair what I did?" regarding those decisions. Describe in your own words what he meant by that question.

GRADING RUBRIC

4 pts. - The response deeply addresses each of the components of the prompt/question. The writing reflects exceptional maturity of thought, composition/craft, and grammar. There is compelling evidence that the response is the result of exceptional engagement with the presentation and the spirit of the prompt/question.

3 pts. - The response addresses each of the components of the prompt/question. The writing reflects maturity of thought, composition/craft, and grammar. There is evidence that the response is the result of strong engagement with the presentation and the spirit of the prompt/question.

2 pts. - The response somewhat addresses each of the components of the prompt/question. The writing reflects moderately mature thought, composition/craft, and/or grammar. There is limited evidence that the response is the result of strong engagement with the presentation and/or the spirit of the prompt/question.

1 pt. - The response does not address one or more of the components of the prompt/question. The writing lacks maturity of thought, composition/craft, and/or grammar. There is little/no evidence that the response is the result of strong engagement with the presentation and the spirit of the prompt/question.

AVHS Band Performance Analysis

Student Name _____ Instrument _____ Date _____

Performance by _____ Location _____ Performance Date _____

Title of Composition _____ Composer _____

Aspect(s) of the composition which were initially challenging to me as a performer	
Technical concepts/skills (instrument specific) strengthened through performance of this composition	
Musical concepts/skills strengthened through performance of this composition	
Critical comments about my individual performance of this composition	
Critical comments about the ensemble performance of this composition	

WRITTEN COMMENT SCORING KEY

- 4 - SPECIFIC AND ACCURATE STATEMENTS CONNECTING THE COMMENT TO THE MUSICAL SCORE** (e.g. "I had a difficult time making the distinction between the marcato accents and regular accents between measures 9 -13"; "The syncopated passage in measure 61 was difficult until I practiced it very slowly while tapping my foot "; "Our band demonstrated great understanding of style by separating the notes in the introduction to the overture")
- 3 - SPECIFIC AND ACCURATE STATEMENTS NOT CONNECTED TO THE MUSICAL SCORE** (e.g. "The note lengths were too long for this style"; "I should tap my foot when I play the hard parts"; "I should use proper mallet technique in this piece")
- 2 - UNSPECIFIC AND/OR INACCURATE STATEMENTS NOT CONNECTED TO THE MUSICAL SCORE** (e.g. "My tone was bad"; "The ending was cool"; "I could have practiced more")
- 1 - VERY UNSPECIFIC OR INACCURATE COMMENTS, STATED IN VERY BROAD TERMS** (e.g. "Our band played well"; "It was great"; "Good job")