

The Musical Decision Tree: A Tool for Effective Rehearsing

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Fundamental Aspects of Musicianship

Dynamics

Pitch

Phrasing

Rhythm

Style

Tone

Musical Priorities

If your ensemble could do one of these aspects innately at an A+ level, and all the others were a solid B, which would you choose?

Dynamics

Volume

Phrasing

Artistic intent, shaping of line, etc.

Pitch

Correct pitch (B vs. Bb) and intonation

Rhythm

Correct rhythm (eighths vs. sixteenths) and steady, unified ensemble pulse

Style

Note shape and length

Tone

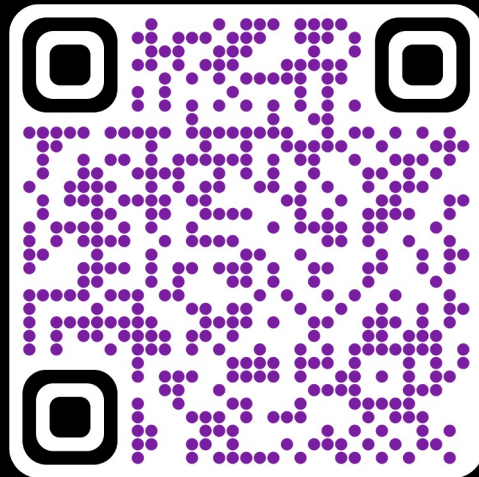
Characteristic individual sound and ensemble balance & blend

If you could choose two? Three? And so on through the list...

What is your top musical priority?

Use this poll to (anonymously) share your top choice

Dynamics
Phrasing
Pitch



Rhythm
Style
Tone



Rehearsal Reflects Priorities

“The way we rehearse reveals our artistic priorities.”

- Dr. Mallory Thompson

About the Decision Tree Approach

This approach is...

- ▶ Developed through personal experience and observation of master teachers
- ▶ Proven effective in the field
- ▶ Flexible, adaptable, and engaging

This approach is not...

- ▶ ***THE*** way (it's simply a way)
- ▶ Intended to be used in isolation
- ▶ Rigid, fixed, and dogmatic

The Process

Listen Listen to the ensemble play the selected passage



Analyze



Diagnose



Refine

Identify the musical priority that is most obstructing musical expression

Determine the aspect of technique that is most likely causing issues with the musical priority

Employ a rehearsal strategy that specifically targets the problematic element of technique

The Process (Another Way)

Listen “What am I hearing?”



Analyze “What’s most on fire?”



Diagnose “Why is it most on fire?”



Refine “How do I stop the fire as fast as possible?”



Step 1 - Listen

- ▶ Listen to the ensemble play the selected passage
- ▶ This requires:
 - ▶ Thorough knowledge of your score
 - ▶ A specific, creative, well-informed artistic point of view
 - ▶ Unbiased ears - listen to what you actually hear, not what you expect to hear

Step 2 - Analyze

- Based on your listening, determine which musical priority is most obstructing musical expression

Phrasing

Rhythm

Tone

Pitch

Dynamics

Style

Step 2 - Analyze

- ▶ Based on your listening, determine which musical priority is most obstructing musical expression
- ▶ If unsure, ask yourself, “If the performance was in 10 minutes, what aspect of the music would need to be refined to allow the ensemble to be maximally expressive?”
- ▶ In other words, “What is most on fire?”

Step 3 - Diagnose

- ▶ Determine the aspect of technique that is causing issues with the identified musical priority
- ▶ Fundamental aspects of technique for winds (could utilize a similar system for percussion, strings, and voice):
 - ▶ Concept - Understanding of the musical task at hand
 - ▶ Air Stream - The three F's: Fuller, Faster, Focused-er
 - ▶ Vowel Shape - The three T's: Teeth, Tongue, Tall
 - ▶ Embouchure - Instrument-specific
 - ▶ Body - Posture, hands, fingers, etc.

Step 4 - Refine

- ▶ Employ a rehearsal strategy that specifically targets the problematic aspect(s) of technique
 - ▶ Formulate a strategy that isolates the targeted aspect of technique
 - ▶ Be creative!
 - ▶ Whenever possible, use a strategy that incorporates elements of “play”

“Scientists have recently determined that it takes approximately 400 repetitions to create a new synapse in the brain - unless it is done with play, in which case it takes between 10 and 20 repetitions.”

Dr Karyn Purvis

Evidence that human physiology is fine-tuned for learning through play. All children know that, can we catch up?



Example #1

Scenario: Ensemble plays passage with florid woodwind lines over brass chorale

Example #1 – Step 1

Scenario: Ensemble plays passage with florid woodwind lines over brass chorale

Step 1 – Listen

You hear that the brass are playing the indicated tempo but the woodwinds are finishing the phrase after them

Example #1 – Step 2

Scenario: Ensemble plays passage with florid woodwind lines over brass chorale

Step 1 – Listen

You hear that the brass are playing the indicated tempo but the woodwinds are finishing the phrase after them

Step 2 – Analyze

Based on your listening, you determine that the

Musical Priority that is most inhibiting expression is...

Tone

Rhythm

Phrasing

Pitch

Style

Dynamics

Example #1 – Step 3

Scenario: Ensemble plays passage with florid woodwind lines over brass chorale

Step 3 – Diagnose

The WW lines are slurred and contain a plethora of chromaticism; their fingers are likely not moving fast enough

The **Aspect of Technique** that is most likely causing the rhythmic issue is...

Concept - Understanding of the musical task at hand

Air Stream - The three F's: Fuller, Faster, Focused-er

Vowel Shape - The three T's: Teeth, Tongue, Tall

Embouchure - Instrument-specific

Body - Posture, hands, fingers, etc.

Example #1 – Step 4

Step 4 – Refine

You employ the following strategies to help address the technique problems on the **Body** causing issues with **Rhythm**

- ▶ Hands alone, listen for keys/valves
- ▶ Hands alone; loop tricky passages
- ▶ Play passage without conductor or metronome

Example #2

Scenario: Beginner band is in their fourth week of rehearsal and learned the concept of embouchure two weeks ago

Example #2 – Step 1

Scenario: Beginner band is in their fourth week of rehearsal and learned the concept of embouchure two weeks ago

Step 1 – Listen

You hear the ensemble playing with a generally unrefined and forced sound, squeaks and squawks abound

Example #2 – Step 2

Scenario: Beginner band is in their fourth week of rehearsal and learned the concept of embouchure two weeks ago

Step 1 – Listen

You hear the ensemble playing with a generally unrefined and forced sound, squeaks and squawks abound

Step 2 – Analyze

Based on your listening, you determine that the

Musical Priority that is most inhibiting expression is...

Tone

Rhythm

Phrasing

Pitch

Style

Dynamics

Example #2 – Step 3

Scenario: Beginner band is in their fourth week of rehearsal and learned the concept of embouchure two weeks ago

Step 3 – Diagnose

Students are likely collapsing their oral cavity and adding unnecessary tension into their embouchure

The **Aspect(s) of Technique** that is (are) most likely causing the tone issues is (are)...

Concept - Understanding of the musical task at hand

Air Stream - The three F's: Fuller, Faster, Focused-er

Vowel Shape - The three T's: Teeth, Tongue, Tall

Embouchure - Instrument-specific

Body - Posture, hands, fingers, etc.

Example #2 – Step 4

Step 4 – Refine

You employ the following strategies to help address the technique problems with Vowel Shape and Embouchure causing issues with Tone

Embouchure

- ▶ Form embouchure (on thumb for woodwinds)
- ▶ Check mouthpiece placement and angle
(by teacher and by a neighbor)
- ▶ Ensure center of embouchure is “squishy firm”

Example #2 – Step 4

Step 4 – Refine

You employ the following strategies to help address the technique problems with Vowel Shape and Embouchure causing issues with Tone

Vowel Shape

- ▶ Sing pitch on specified vowel
- ▶ Aurally imagine (audiate before playing)
- ▶ Place pinky between molars to kinesthetically feel necessary amount of oral cavity space

Thoughts about the process...

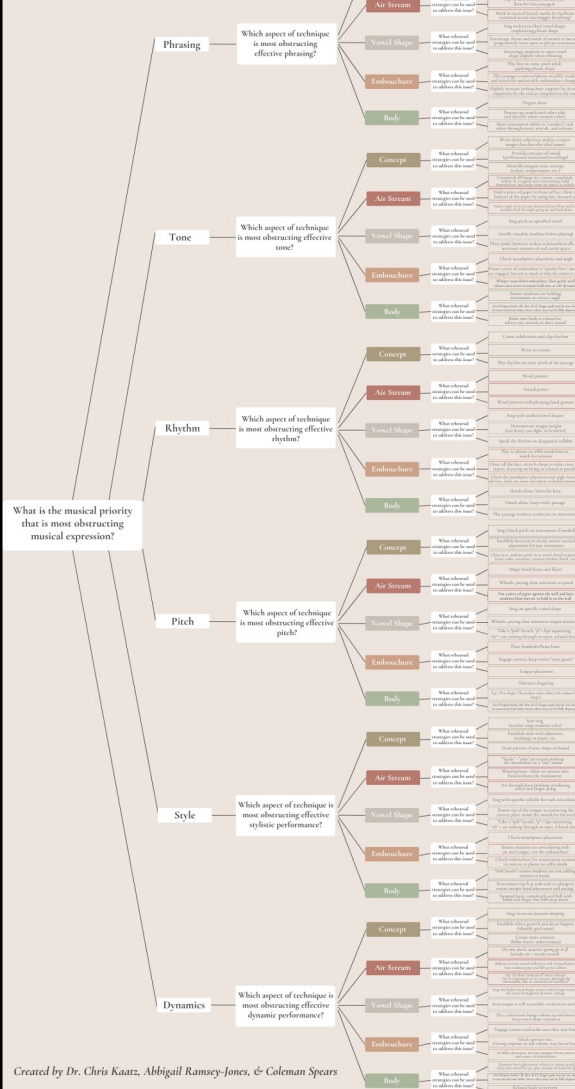
- ▶ If new, this “decision tree” process may be slow at first
- ▶ Eventually, your ability to accurately listen, analyze, diagnose, and apply an appropriate refinement strategy will be nearly automatic
- ▶ Additionally, you’ll build a large repertoire of rehearsal strategies for specifically targeting various performance issues
- ▶ To get you started...



Access handout
via QR code



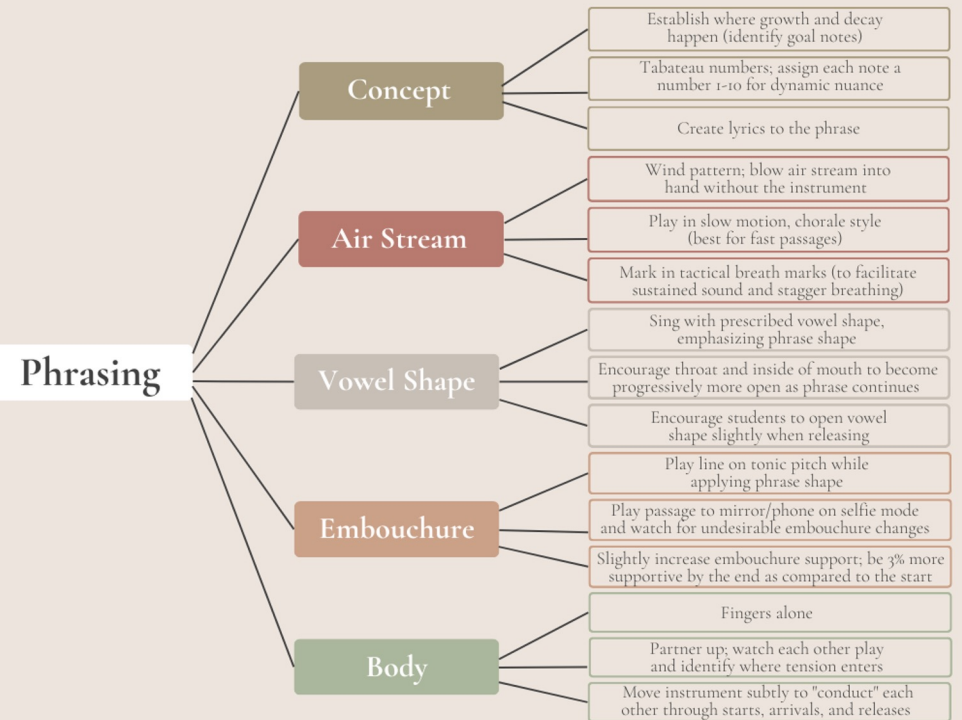
The Musical Decision Tree: A Tool for Effective Rehearsing 2023 Midwest Clinic



Created by Dr. Chris Kaatz, Abbigail Ramsey-Jones, & Coleman Spears

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Wind Studies



Created by Dr. Chris Kaatz, Abbigail Ramsey-Jones, & Coleman Spears

For a More Interactive Approach...

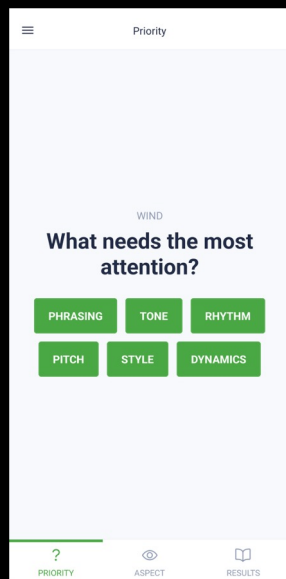


Cue Rehearsal Techniques

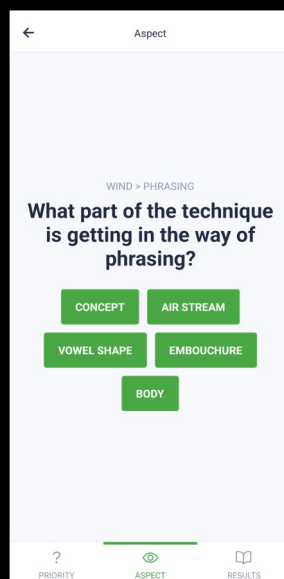


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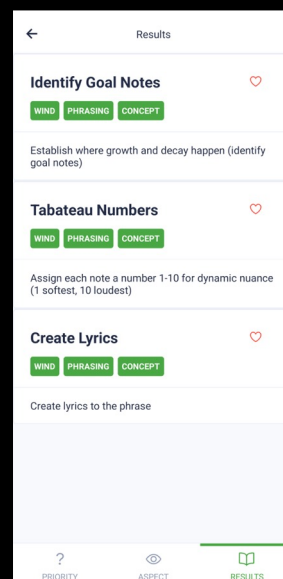
Cue Rehearsal Techniques Workflow



Priority



Aspect



Results

Features

- Wind, Strings, and Percussion Studies

- Favorites

- User Techniques

Development Pipeline

- Voice Study



Decision
Tree
Handout



Presentation
Slides

Questions?

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