

Click Save: How to Plan Rehearsals to Optimize Learning & Retention

Plan from Long to Medium to Short Term

Set your final destination, plan your stopovers, then your day-to-day itinerary

Final destination: what we want students to have learned by the end of the year, or even the whole time they are in our program (3+ years)

Stopovers: are our performances, assessments or landmarks

Day to day itinerary: what happens each rehearsal / lesson

Information Required to Plan Effectively

- The What
 - the knowledge, skill and experiences we want students to have

What do I want my students to learn by the end of this year?

What's their current starting point?

- The When
 - the sequence of what students will learn and when
 - Landmarks and events
 - how much rehearsal time we have available

When will they learn this, and in what order?

Why

Planning in this way ensures:

- Students have a robust, sequential learning experience
- We cover all the content required without missing essential steps or experiences
- Students experience more success, engagement and enjoyment because the learning is appropriately planned and sequenced

What happens if we don't do it

We risk:

- Introducing concepts and skills that are too advanced or non-sequential, causing frustrating rehearsals, disengagement and student attrition
- Choosing repertoire that isn't aligned with learning outcomes, or has little educational or artistic value
- We choose repertoire for poor reasons

The What

What are all the things (knowledge, skills, experience) you want your students to learn/experience this year?
What gets missed when you're planning rehearsals that's important to you and your students?

Use the **Yearly Skill Inventory & Goals Planner** to record your ensemble's end of year long term goals (final destination) and their incoming abilities (departure point). [Download here.](#)

Good to know

- You can choose to start with either the destination or departure point
- Both ways will require adjustment as you consider what is achievable in the available time with this particular cohort of students
- The less you know the students, the more you'll have to adjust your plans and goals as the year progresses

The When

Sequence: "When will we learn it, and in what order"

Use the **Yearly Repertoire & Skills Planner** to:

- Break down the learning sequence for each skill/concept/experience
- Allocate or brainstorm the specific repertoire you will use to teach each skills/concepts/experiences

[Download here.](#)

You can either:

- Start at the end and work backwards, revise/adjust
- Work from incoming abilities, scope outwards, revise/adjust

Good to know

- In this process it's likely you'll have to revise your final destination
- If you're worried you're aiming too high or trying to fit in too much you probably are
- Ensure you include how you will consolidate previous learning, not just add new content
- Consolidation of skills is fundamental to learning and retention

Timeline: "What commitments do we have?"

- What is set in stone? Performances, festivals, special events
- What is likely? Special events, ad-hoc performances

- What is possible? Guest artists, assemblies etc.

Use the **Yearly Ensemble Performance & Repertoire Planner** to systematically list your performances and rehearsal time.

[Download here.](#)

Allocating Rehearsal Time: “How much time do we have?”

1. Determine total rehearsal time available (number of rehearsals x duration)
 - a. You should have worked this out using the Yearly Ensemble Performance & Repertoire Planner (above)
2. Determine the non-repertoire time you need to set aside each rehearsal and/or over the entire period, including:
 - a. Warm-Ups (a fixed amount? variable?)
 - b. Non-Repertoire Activities (see ‘What’ section, and remember to include what you normally miss!)
3. Allocate remaining repertoire time using the time allocation formula (below)

Time Allocation Formula: “How much time on each piece?”

- A tool to accurately determine how much time to spend on our repertoire during rehearsals.
- Uses the duration of the work and level of difficulty (for your ensemble) to determine what percentage of rehearsal time each work should take relative to the others.
- Can be used across a single rehearsal, or across an entire cycle of rehearsals.

1. Duration (mins) x Difficulty (out of 10*) = Piece Number

Example:

New Anzacs by Brian Hogg: $2.5 \times 4 = 10$

Banish the Moon by Tania Owens: $2.5 \times 7 = 17.5$

Arabian Dances by Roland Barrett: $3 \times 6 = 18$

** Difficulty out of 10 for YOUR particular group, at THIS particular time, taking into account their specific abilities (don't use publisher grade number!)*

2. Add Piece Numbers to get Total

$$10 + 17.5 + 18 = 45.5$$

3. Convert pieces to percentages of Total

$$(\text{Piece Number} \div \text{Total}) \times 100 = \%$$

Example:

New Anzacs:	$10 \div 45.5 = 0.219 = 22\%$
Banish the Moon:	$17.5 \div 45.5 = 0.385 = 38\%$
Arabian Dances:	$18 \div 45.5 = 0.396 = 40\%$

Good to know

- Giving your own difficulty rating allows you to more accurately determine the time YOUR group needs on the piece
- If you end up with very small percentages or amounts of time (eg. 10 mins), consider doing these works on alternate rehearsals with double the time (eg. 20 mins every second rehearsal)
- You can apply these percentages across a single rehearsal (eg. Banish the Moon gets 22% of 40 mins = 8 mins) or a whole rehearsal cycle (Banish the Moon gets 22% of 250 mins across 6 rehearsals = 55 mins)

Use the **Time Allocation Formula** to determine how much rehearsal time you have for each piece you're working on.

Structures for Learning & Retention

Macro-Micro-Macro

We've heard this principle applied to score study (our learning) - it only makes sense it should also apply to our ensemble's learning of the music.

Macro - start with big picture, give ensemble understanding of the context

Micro - zoom in on details

Macro - zoom out, putting the details back in context

Getting Meta! Applying Macro-Micro-Macro

This principle should be applied across a whole rehearsal cycle (macro) and within a single section of music we're working on in a rehearsal (micro) 🤖

Applying to a Rehearsal Cycle

Rehearsal Number	Focus Level
1	Macro: Run Through Start to Finish
2	Zooming In: Start working on detail
3	Micro: Detail
4	Micro: Detail
5	Zooming Out: Running Bigger Sections
6	Macro: Full Run Through + Tidying Up/Final Comments

Applying to a single passage in a rehearsal

Learning Sequence	Focus Level
"We're going to work on measures 25 - 48 now. Let's play the section so we understand it as a whole"	Macro Play excerpt in full, 25-28
Let's focus on the rhythm from 25-32. (Rehearse it)	Micro Zoom in on a detail/problem
Good work! Now let's put that back in context and play from 25-48.	Zoom out Put the solution in a slightly bigger context
Now let's work on 33-48.	Micro Zoom in on another detail/problem
Let's put our two sections together and play from 25-48.	Macro Put both solutions into context of the excerpt
Now let's go from the beginning and put all of that in context. From 1- 69.	Even bigger Macro Zoom out even further, starting before and finishing after the excerpt

How can you apply Macro-Micro-Macro to your rehearsals?

9 Micro Structures for Cementing Learning

1. Start to End

- We do this all the time (oops!)
- It gets the start sounding good
- Concentration can flag
- Often falls over at the same place every time if we keep playing whole piece

2. Working Backwards

Ensures the end of a piece/section is as confident and well-rehearsed as the beginning. Engaging in a different way.

- Start at the end of a section
- Rehearse/problem solve
- Add preceding bars
- Keep adding until you've done the whole section

3. Bookending Transitions

Cements a very tricky 'corner' in the music in a very efficient way

4. Expand Front and/or Back

Cementing a troublesome 'corner' or technical challenge
Putting it in context after it has been isolated

- Rehearse the problem spot
- Add small segments of bars before or after, gradually expanding outwards
- Similar to book-ending

5. Four Correct Repetitions

Once you've got a passage correct, embed it properly so it will stick with four correct repetitions (Thanks to Anita Collins)

- Play a polished correct section 4x in a row one after the other

6. Looping

An efficient way of getting multiple repetitions of something you've polished up without stopping or talking

Can be a short or medium segment (eg. Up to 8 bars)

- Play for a chosen number of repetitions, immediately looping from the end back to the start (no talking or stopping)

7. Reviewing Past Work

- Explicitly planning and incorporating revision from the previous rehearsal

8. Contextualizing

- Putting a section back in context
- Similar to reviewing, but within the same rehearsal

9. Visualizing and Mental Repetitions

- Select a passage of music you've been working on
- Ask students to visualize themselves playing the music in their head - imagining what it will feel like in their body, what they will think about, what it will sound like

Variations:

- With / out physical movement
- With / out instrument
- With / out music (eyes closed)

Cementing Learning

Pencils

- There is no excuse for not writing on the music - brains are unreliable, so externalise the information on paper
- Be explicit when asking ensemble to write "Now pick up your pencils, and at bar 57 write 'Listen to clarinets'"

Sheets in Folders

Use written resources to reinforce fundamental content, such as:

- Student-made glossary of musical terminology/unfamiliar terms*
- Student-made glossary of rehearsal/musical concepts* eg. low voices lead the crescendo, high voices lead the diminuendo,
- Student-written list of pieces being played in each performance*
- Intonation Charts, Rhythm sheets, Cycle of 4ths etc

* If students hand-write the content themselves they're more likely to retain the information.

Questioning, Peer Learning & Verbal Recap

"Turn and talk to your stand partner for one minute, and answer..."

- What was the most valuable thing you just learned? Why?

- What do you need to remember in this passage? What happens if we don't do it?
- What just improved? How did you improve it?
- What's the next thing you need to focus on?
- Is what you're doing working? Why/why not?
- Where do you need to focus your attention in this passage?

We know that our first answers are not always the most valuable. After each of these questions, ask students to follow up twice with "And what else?"

Written Reflection & Goal Setting

- Asking students to write answers to reflection questions (like those above) challenges them to think deeply about their learning experiences and understanding.
- Writing allows them more time to give deeper, more considered answers compared to speaking.

Quizzes

- Quizzes can be useful in not only cementing concrete information like 'What key is Air for Band in?' but in cementing skills and concepts.

Questions could include:

- Who has the melody at letter C? (Multiple choice)
- Which part most looks like accompaniment? (Multiple choice with musical examples)
- When you have accompaniment what do you need to do to ensure the audience can hear the melody? (Multiple choice: a. listen for who has the melody, b. Listen to who has the same part as me, c. Listen to myself, d. Listen to the audience)

Whatever resources require you to print/copy/create something add this into your planning timeline so you know when you need it by, and set aside time in your calendar to print/copy/create it!

Communicating Plans

An accessible visual plan helps people understand expectations, know what is coming next and track their progress.

Daily Rehearsal Plan

Have this written or projected on the board, visible at all times throughout the rehearsal

- Minimum: What piece and what section eg. Arabian Dances, bar 9-40 / order
 - The detail is especially helpful for percussionists in knowing what to set up
 - It helps students with less challenging parts know what to look forward to
- Even better: Learning Intentions for each piece
 - Even something as simple as 'Bar 9-40 - Rhythm, Balance' is great!

- Success Criteria: By the end of this rehearsal we will be able to...

Rehearsal Cycle/Season/Semester Plan

Making this public helps students understand where they should be up to and where they are in relation to the next milestone/concert

We think this way, but they won't unless we help them! (Teenage brains don't work that way!)

- Write on Board in permanent marker or project a digital version
- Have printed/hard copies on the walls, noticeboards and in folders so students can see where they are up to
- Having a digital plan is GREAT for community ensembles - give everyone a QR code or link (or put QR code in their folders) that links to a Google Sheet. You can update it as needed throughout the rehearsal cycle, and also use it to house other information like how to access recordings of works etc. (NB. Be kind and don't make big changes at the last minute!)

Adjusting Plans

We MUST be willing to be flexible and responsive to what's happening in the moment with our ensembles (rather than doggedly sticking to the plan even when it's not working)

Track your progress

Save yourself the frustration and panic of:

- *"Oh, I haven't looked at this music AT ALL since last rehearsal and have NO IDEA what I'm going to do today because I can't remember what happened yesterday"*

Ticks & Crosses

- During or immediately after your rehearsal put ticks/crosses against your rehearsal plan for what you did/didn't cover.
- Go back to your medium term plan and adjust it eg. add what you didn't cover today to next rehearsal.

Post-It Notes

- During or immediately after your rehearsal use Post-It notes on your scores to record things you noticed especially:
 - Unexpected things NOT on your plan anywhere (bar 57 clarinet chord is out of tune)
 - Persistent issues you thought you had solved (bar 79 rhythm still not together)
 - Things that fixed themselves (bar 37 is fine, doesn't need more rehearsal)
 - Questions players asked that you couldn't answer on the spot (should there be an F# on beat 3 in the trumpets in bar 89?)

- Go back to your medium term plan and adjust it eg. work out when you will address these issues (and set a time to work out if it IS an F# or not!)

Resources, Downloads & Templates

See [here](#).

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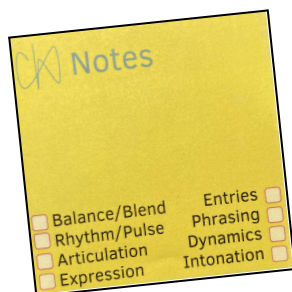
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