

VOICE *for* LIFE



White Level

Choir Trainer's Guide

RS  M

Introduction

Introduction to the White Level

The *Voice for Life* White Level is intended for use with both children and adults who are new to choral singing. It introduces and assesses very basic choral skills and understanding. A list of targets for singers at this level is below.

Singers at White Level should be able to:

- Stand and sit well when singing, holding music appropriately
- Sing with focus and concentration in rehearsals, performances and church services
- Follow the conductor, especially at key moments within a piece, such as the start and end
- Match the pitch of a note (within an appropriate range) sung to them or played on the piano
- Sing a five-note scale up and down
- Identify which of two notes is higher or lower
- Sing back a simple one-bar melody within a five-note range
- Clap in time to a familiar song or hymn
- Find their place in a musical score using bar numbers
- Understand common musical symbols, including repeats, breath marks and pauses (fermatas)
- Identify their vocal line within a score
- Know and understand the basic dynamic markings (*pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, crescendo and diminuendo)
- Attend choir rehearsals regularly and punctually
- Advise the choir director in advance when they are going to be absent
- Make a positive contribution to the choir

Additional targets may be specified by the choir director according to local custom. These might include anything from putting away robes and music tidily at the end of services to knowing the vestry prayer by heart.

A White Level Record Card is available to enable you to keep track of each singer's progress through the level. Once a singer has completed all the targets, they can be awarded the White Level Certificate and White Lapel Badge.

Those choirs that have a probationary period for new choristers may require them to complete the White Level before they are admitted as a full member of the choir. For robed choirs, it may also be your custom to award a surplice at this stage. To mark this special occasion, an RSCM 'Admission to the choir' certificate is available. Some choirs also choose to present singers with the *Voice for Life Chorister's Companion* on joining the choir.

White Level Record Cards, badges and certificates, alongside a wide range of additional *Voice for Life* resources, are available for purchase from RSCM Music Direct.

Introduction

White Level Learning Materials

The Choir Trainer's Guide to the White Level contains information on:

- Using the voice well
- Developing musical skills and understanding
- Welcoming new members

To supplement the Choir Trainer's Guide there are additional learning materials for use with your singers:

- Posture worksheet
- Musical symbols flashcards
- Pulse & rhythm worksheet
- Musical geography worksheet
- Musical symbols worksheet
- Musical signs & symbols quiz

For a limited period these resources are available to freely download from the RSCM website. You may photocopy these resources and encourage your singers to visit the RSCM website to download the worksheets. Additional materials and further guidance on running a choir may be found in the *Voice for Life* Choir Trainer's Book.

Beyond the White Level

The White Level is the first of five levels in the *Voice for Life* scheme:

- 1 White
- 2 Light Blue
- 3 Dark Blue
- 4 Red
- 5 Yellow

As with the White Level, the higher levels also include a series of graded targets which are assessed informally by the choir trainer or teacher. Once a singer has completed the necessary training for that level they can be awarded a RSCM *Voice for Life* medal and the appropriately coloured ribbon or coloured lapel badge. The singer then moves on to the next level.

The syllabuses for the Light Blue through to Yellow levels, together with teaching materials, are published in the *Voice for Life* Choir Trainer's Book, which is a comprehensive guide to the scheme. For singers there are a series of workbooks containing learning materials and a place to chart their progress through the level. These and other resources, including the *Voice for Life* Chorister's Companion, are available from RSCM Music Direct.

Using the voice well

Healthy voice use

Singing is a physical activity. It requires energy, strength, agility and stamina.

Encourage new choristers to think of their whole body as a musical instrument. They will need to engage their lungs, diaphragm, ribs, stomach muscles, back muscles, larynx, mouth, lips, tongue, and more to create sound! With this in mind, it means that:

- Good posture is vital – how your singers stand and sit to sing has an effect on the sound they produce.
- Warm-ups at the start of a rehearsal or private practice time are important – this is the equivalent to an athlete stretching out their muscles before undertaking some strenuous training. Warm-ups help the voice work better during the rehearsal and ensure that it is much less likely to feel sore or tired by the end of the rehearsal.
- Like an athlete undertaking regular training, a singer's voice needs regular training and exercise to keep all the muscles and vocal functions strong. Regular exercise of the voice improves strength and stamina. Encourage your singers to try some of the warm-ups at home during the week, as well as singing around the house or in the car, or joining other singing groups.
- Singers need to look after their whole body. If a singer feels overtired, stressed or unwell they will not sing as well as they normally would. Even what they eat and drink can have an effect on the voice.

The parallel between singing and sport can be a useful one to use when working with singers. Very often beginner singers are surprised by just how much physical energy is required to produce a focused and well projected sound. By using this parallel between singing and sport you are helping to reinforce the idea that singing is a physical activity which requires regular training and exercise in order for the singer to improve in strength, stamina and agility.

The *Voice for Life Choir Trainer's Book*, *Voice for Life Songbook 1* and *Songbook 2* all contain warm-ups which will help you work on areas like posture, breathing, tone and range. There are many other books available which will provide you with ideas for keeping your warm-ups varied and imaginative.

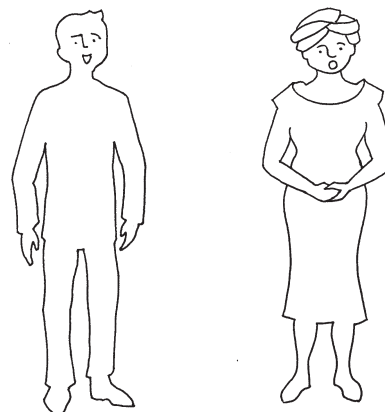
Tip: Try the exercises out for yourself before you ask your choir to do them, and make sure you know why you are asking your singers to engage in a particular exercise – what is it you are trying to achieve? What skill are you trying to improve?

Using the voice well

Posture

When a singer stands to sing, they should have:

- A tall posture with a straight back and upright head
- Weight distributed evenly on both feet
- Relaxed knees
- Relaxed shoulders
- Feet slightly apart and firmly on the ground

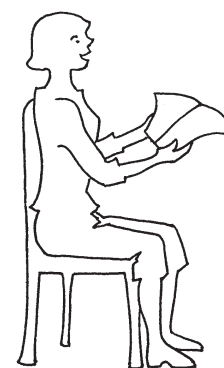


If a singer's posture is poor tension starts to creep into various muscles in the body. This gradually affects the singing voice making it feel and sound tired.

Tip: In your warm-up, when working with beginners, or young singers, try asking what they think makes good posture when standing to sing. It is good to encourage them to put what they know into words rather than always being told by their choir trainer or teacher.

Generally, it is better to stand than sit while singing, but with a good posture it is still possible to sing well while sitting. Encourage the following when your singers are sitting:

- An upright posture
- Relaxed shoulders
- A straight back
- Both feet firmly on the ground (this is sometimes difficult when you are working with very young children whose feet cannot reach the floor from the chair they are sat on. In this case just encourage them to sit as well as they can, without slouching.)



Try and discourage your singers from crossing their legs when they sit to sing as this will make their bodies twist and restricts airflow.

Tip: It is good to begin a rehearsal with some relaxation exercises. In order to introduce good posture you need to help your singers get rid of any tension that has crept in to the body during the day. Gentle stretches, rolling the shoulders, and massaging the face can all help to relax your singers so they are ready to assume a good posture for singing.

Using the voice well

Holding music

In a choir singers often need to hold books or scores. The way they hold their music affects their posture, and can also make the difference between whether or not they can see the conductor!

If music is held too high, it covers the mouth, blocking the sound.



Too low, and the sound goes straight down to the floor.

Either way, the singer cannot see their conductor properly. In addition the singer will not be seen or heard as well as they should by the congregation or audience.

Encourage your singers to hold their music so they can see you conducting over the top of the music without moving their head – they should just be able to move their eyes.



Tip: A singer's worksheet covering aspects of posture is available online. You may find this helpful to work through in a rehearsal with your singers.

Using the voice well

Breathing

Breathing is a natural reflex. This means that in normal life we do not have to think about it – it happens automatically. However, when singing we do need to think more about how we use our breath. Breathing affects all aspects of the voice including the tone of the singing voice, dynamics, and tuning. By teaching your singers to control their breathing, increase their breath capacity and breathe in the right places, you will also help them make sense of the words and music they sing.

When breathing to sing, your singers need to learn to:

- Take in deeper breaths, lower in the body
- Control the outward breath
- Breathe in the right places in the music to make sense of the words and musical phrases
- Keep the chest, shoulders and throat relaxed and open

When practising breathing it is very easy for tension to creep into the body. As you practise breathing with your singers, look out for the following:

- The shoulders should not move up and down when breathing in and out
- The throat and neck area should not look tense
- The chest should not heave up and down when breathing in and out
- Inhalation should be silent – if you can hear noise during an intake of breath, there is tension in the body.

Tip: Always try to include some breathing exercises in your warm-up. This will help focus your singers, gently start to prepare the body for singing, and will also help increase their breath capacity and control. You might like to try the following exercise:

Breathe in silently to four counts, hold for four counts, then let the air escape to a steady 'Shh' over another four counts. Repeat the exercise a few times, then try vocalizing on the way out using sounds such as 'vvv' or 'zzz' or 'hmm' at a comfortable pitch and keeping the sound steady. You can then increase the number of counts which your singers are exhaling over (but keep the number of counts you inhale and hold to, at four).

There are many other breathing exercises available in the *Voice for Life* resources, including in the *Chorister's Companion* and *Singer's Workbooks* which are designed to encourage your singers to practice at home between rehearsals.

Using the voice well

Tone

When working with beginner singers, it is most important to first establish good posture and help them begin to learn to control their breathing. Initially the sound of their voice may be quite soft, or breathy and they may have a very small vocal range. This is absolutely normal and it is important to keep your focus on encouraging them to enjoy singing rather than pushing them to increase their volume for example.

Over time, if their posture is good, they breathe well when singing, and they are encouraged to feel a valuable part of the choir, you should find that the volume they can produce improves and the tone becomes more resonant. By continuing to sing regularly in the choir (and hopefully in between rehearsals on their own as well) their voice should grow in strength, range and agility. You will be surprised how much your singers will pick up from listening to other more experienced singers around them!

Tip: Try using simple exercises like sirening or sliding with the voice at the beginning of your rehearsals – you can even use ‘voice scribbling’ with your young singers, encouraging them to slide around with their voices to ‘hmm’ or ‘ooo’ following the sound up and down with their finger. You can ask them to make different sounds with their voices: whisper their name, gasp in surprise, cackle like a witch, say ‘hello’ in a cheerful sing-song way, sing ‘nah nah nah nah nah’ (playground chant) back to you, etc. This will all help them to loosen up the voice, extend its range, and just relax and enjoy the different sounds their voice can make.

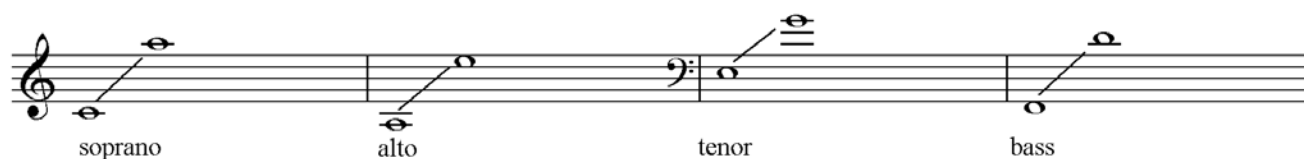
Once singers move on to Light Blue Level of *Voice for Life* they will be introduced to the idea of controlling the tone or resonance of their voice and will be helped to extend their range further.

Using the voice well

Range

The tone and range of every individual voice will differ greatly. With training, the musically acceptable vocal range of a singer is liable to expand. Conversely, the aging process may reduce the range of a singer.

Most choral music for SATB choir is within the ranges shown below. There are, however, plenty of examples that extend the upper and lower ranges for each part.



In reality a majority of adult female singers are probably best described as mezzo sopranos, which is somewhere between soprano and alto, while most adult males are baritones – somewhere between tenor and bass. A decision as to which part a choir member will sing will not always be dictated solely by their vocal range. Other factors such as their vocal timbre and music reading ability should also be taken into account.

It is worth bearing in mind that mezzo sopranos and baritones that always sing alto or bass respectively will be in danger of losing their upper range if they don't regularly exercise it. For this reason it is good to encourage all of your singers to exercise their full range when they warm-up.

Children up to five years old have a small range of comfortable notes, usually from about middle C to around the G a fifth above. Average seven to eleven year olds can usually comfortably sing notes within the octave above middle C, whereas those who sing regularly and are encouraged to develop their upper range will be able to sing well above that. Few children have a range much below middle C until adolescence, although occasional Bs and B flats should be possible.

Tip: For guidance on how to support both adolescent boys and girls with changing voices see the appendix of the *Voice for Life Choir Trainer's Book*.

Musical skills and understanding

Following the conductor

It is helpful to encourage good habits from the moment a singer joins the choir. Learning to watch the conductor is particularly important and is closely linked with posture and the need to hold books or music in a suitable position when singing. Coach your choristers from the start to look down at their music as little as possible, encouraging them to read ahead and look up and out when they sing.

At White Level choristers are not expected to identify different beat patterns but they should be able to respond to a conductor's gestures, especially at key moments of a piece such as starts, ends and pauses (fermatas). A good way to practise this is to spend a few minutes playing around with tempi to see whether the singers can follow you (this is good practise for the conductor as well – if your singers consistently find it difficult to follow you perhaps you are being unclear!). For example, sing the end of a piece three or four times, each time at a different speed. Also vary the length of the last note each time and show them where to place the final consonant. You might also ask your singers to take turns in conducting the last note – young singers will leap at the opportunity to be the leader and the others will watch them like hawks!

If your choir performs uncondacted make sure that they know and practise where to look. It is important that the choir looks engaged when it sings.

Tip: When working with young singers try designating several points around the room 'focus points' and number them. For example, Focus 1 might be the top RH corner of the room, Focus 2, the top LH corner, and Focus 3 the conductor. When you call out 'Focus 1' everyone must look intently at the designated point, without talking or moving. When you say 'Focus 2' or 'Focus 3' they must immediately switch their attention to these points. Rapidly call out the different points in different combinations to see how fast the singers can respond to your instructions.

This game can be useful performance preparation, encouraging singers to watch the conductor or look up at the back of the room rather than letting their eyes and attention wander while they sing.

Musical skills and understanding

Pitch

The first stage in developing a sense of pitch is to be able to differentiate high from low; as the ear develops this will evolve into an ability to hear the shape of a melody. Initially, beginners may find it difficult to match the pitch of a single note precisely, let alone a melody, but this should come with practise.

Tip: At this very basic level, it can be helpful to experiment with vocal sounds in different registers (e.g. a high-pitched 'yoo-hoo' and a low 'mmm') where the pitch can be matched approximately rather than exactly. Vocal slides (on 'ng' or 'oo') are also useful for this purpose, particularly when the changing pitch is expressed also physically, for example by tracing a line in the air with a finger. Such exercises are a valuable part of any vocal warm-up.

The Hungarian composer and teacher Zoltán Kodály observed that young children find the minor third the easiest interval to replicate (it's found in many well-known playground chants). Try using this interval with young choristers when you take the register at the start of a rehearsal or say goodbye at the end – this gives individual singers the opportunity to hear themselves clearly without being able to rely on other singers and enables you to easily monitor progress of beginners.

Example:

Choir trainer Hel - lo E - mi - ly. Good - bye

Emily Hel - lo Miss Jones. Good - bye Miss Jones.

Initially choristers may sing back the same pattern of notes but at a different pitch, but over time they will be able to echo it back precisely.

Alternatively, try incorporating a listening game in your junior choir rehearsal. Sing a question and ask the relevant choristers to respond, e.g.:

Example:

Choir trainer Who's wear-ing glass - es?

Bespectacled choristers I'm wear-ing glass - es.

Choir trainer Who likes foot - ball?

Football-loving choristers I like foot - ball.

Musical skills and understanding

Other questions could include ‘Who’s name is ____?’, to encourage choristers to sing solo, or ‘Who’s got green hair?’ (which should elicit silence!).

To develop musical memory it is good to teach at least some music by rote as well as from scores. Short songs – such chants from the Taizé or Iona communities – are ideal for this purpose. Use a technique called lining out where you sing through the piece phrase by phrase, with your singers repeating each line as an echo. If you do this regularly in rehearsals your singers should have no problem singing back a short one-bar melody, in line with the White Level target. You could use one of the following or make them up yourself but make sure it is in an appropriate vocal range:

Short one bar melodies:



Male choir trainers may find that they initially need to use falsetto when working with young choristers, otherwise some may try to replicate pitches at a lower octave. Once their sense of pitch improves it should be possible to return to your normal register.

Be aware that matching a pitch from the piano is generally more difficult than a voice and that this also needs practise.

Tip: Regularly using simple note patterns based on scales or triads during a warm-up is a good way to improve pitching over the long term as it increases tonal awareness. This will provide the foundations for the aural and sightreading skills at the Light Blue Level of *Voice for Life*.

It is also beneficial to find opportunities to develop inner hearing, perhaps by singing simple songs with specific words omitted, encouraging the singers to ‘think’ the missing notes in their head (e.g. sing ‘The Grand Old Duke of York’ leaving out the word ‘up’ each time it comes, then ‘down’, then both together and finally a version where you only sing ‘up’ and ‘down’ and sing the rest of the song in your thinking voice).

Musical skills and understanding

Pitching problems

Most choir trainers will at some stage encounter a singer who has trouble pitching notes accurately. Pitching problems occur for all kinds of reasons, and there are varying degrees of difficulty a singer might have. For example, you might have a young singer who can only sing a low range of notes in tune and can't seem to access any higher notes at all, or a singer who can't hear which octave they should be singing in and pitches an octave lower than everyone else, or maybe you have a singer who can't seem to sing in tune at all and drones very audibly below the rest of the choir all the time.

Some pitching problems occur simply because a singer has a tight jaw or their posture is bad when they sing, or because they are not breathing properly. Other problems occur because a singer cannot seem to connect their ears and their voice when singing – their 'inner hearing' is not properly developed yet.

There are countless people in the world who describe themselves as 'tone deaf' because a teacher once told them they couldn't sing and made them leave the choir, or asked them just to mime instead. They wish they could sing, but have no confidence to try it again. In fact, most experts agree that there is no such condition as 'tone deafness' and that it is just that some people take longer to acquire the ability to sing in tune.

Whilst it can be difficult if you have a singer in the choir who has serious trouble pitching, perhaps droning below the other singers, you will need to manage the situation as sensitively as possible. Try to take the following approach:

- Never criticize them publicly
- Never tell them they can't sing
- Find some time to work with them individually
- If your other choir members are finding it difficult to handle or funny, try and find time to have a quiet word with them and ask them to be supportive of the singer(s) who are struggling with pitching. Make them feel that you trust them to be helpful and part of the solution. Explain it is important not to laugh at the singer who is struggling with their pitching, and that over time, their pitching should improve by having the chance to sing with other people who can pitch well.
- Take them into consideration when choosing your repertoire for the choir – if they generally find it easier to sing in a lower range, don't choose a unison piece for high voices!

Tip: Often with young children they just need time for their ears and their voices to start working together properly. Over time, with patience and encouragement their pitching will improve immeasurably often without you needing to spend time individually working on it.

If you have a singer who is really struggling you might like to find time for some short 5-minute sessions (perhaps immediately before or after a choir rehearsal) when you can work individually with the singer who is finding their pitching difficult. It is usually best to keep these sessions very relaxed and informal.

Musical skills and understanding

You might like to begin by asking them to sing you a note (any note they like) – sing them the same note back (or you can find it on the piano). Ask them to sing it again, and repeat playing/singing them the same note back. Make sure you give them time to hear that the note they are hearing on the piano (or from your voice) is the same as the one they have sung. Sing it together again and then one after another. Sing some questions for them to answer on this same note: ‘What is your name?’...‘My name is....’ and so on.

Once you have got them comfortable singing this particular note, then sing or play the next note up (or down) from the one they have selected and ask them if they can sing it back. If they find this easy to do, try introducing some very simple call and response patterns over these two notes. If they find it hard at first to copy you, ask them to sing you their name then you imitate them. Repeat this exercise a few times before you sing something on these two notes for your singer to imitate.

You can also try playing or singing them two notes and asking them if they can hear which one is higher.

Above all, throughout this process you need to be flexible and relaxed! You won’t necessarily find a quick fix to a singer’s pitching problems but over time with patience, understanding and encouragement they will improve.

Musical skills and understanding

Pulse and rhythm

At White Level choristers do not need to understand time signatures or know the values of notes and rests (although, on the whole, the earlier these are introduced the better) but they will need to be able to differentiate between pulse and rhythm in order to be able to clap in time to a familiar piece of music. Find opportunities in rehearsals to tap, clap or walk in time to pieces of music that you are working on. As with pitching, a sense of rhythm will come more naturally to some than to others, but be aware that an inability to clap in time is sometimes due to a lack of co-ordination rather than a problem with feeling the pulse.

Rhythm games can also be incorporated in rehearsals during warm-ups or as a means of gaining focus when choristers are getting tired or fidgety. Here are two examples:

1) Don't clap this one back

Teach the singers this rhythm:



Every time they hear you clap it ask them to respond by saying 'Don't clap this one back' to the same rhythm. If you clap any other rhythm they respond by clapping it back as an echo. Anyone who claps back the special rhythm instead of saying 'Don't clap this one back' is out.

2) Body rhythm

Keep a steady rhythm using body percussion: stamp each foot in turn, slap each knee in turn, then tap chest with one hand then the other and clap both hands together. Gradually drop each element and replace with rests, thinking the beats in your head. Repeat each rhythm several times before moving on. After several bars of silence, bring all the elements back in again.

stamp stamp knee knee chest chest clap knee knee chest chest clap chest chest clap

clap stamp stamp knee knee chest chest clap

This exercise helps develop an inner sense of pulse which is the next stage after being able to clap or tap the pulse aloud.

Musical skills and understanding

Following a score

It is not necessary for a chorister to understand every musical symbol before they can follow a score. Initially they may just follow the words and perhaps the melodic contours. Over time, and with help, they can learn to identify and interpret the full range of signs and symbols.

Note names and durations are not tested until Light Blue Level of the Voice for Life scheme but you may wish to start work on these from the moment a chorister joins the choir.

In rehearsal, think carefully about the needs of beginner singers when starting work on a new piece. It is easy enough to follow a unison melody line when the words are written underneath or to follow the words of a hymn, but if there are several staves within one system or there are multiple lines of text written under each note, beginners are likely to need help to follow the score. With young singers it can be helpful to position a more experienced chorister next to them to point to their place in the music.

If there are repeats of any kind, especially those with first and second time bars, *dal segno* markings or *codas*, carefully explain the geography of the piece before you start work on it.

When you give directions such as 'Let's start at the upbeat to bar 5', make sure that all the singers understand what you mean. It may take young singers a while to get the hang of it but it is worth persisting.

Tip: Once you've introduced the concept of bars and bar numbers to younger singers, make finding their place in the score into a game, for example by saying 'Who can be the first to silently point to bar number 12?' or asking 'What word do we sing at the start of bar 60?'

Knowledge of dynamic markings is not essential for following the score but they are very easy to learn and this kind of knowledge can be empowering for beginners. Pauses (*fermatas*) are more crucial as they need to understand their musical function and learn to watch the conductor at such moments. It is also helpful to introduce breath markings at an early stage so that choristers understand how to mark in directions if you say 'go through in bar 12 without a breath' or 'breathe after forever'. Use the flashcards and singers' worksheets to help introduce these symbols.

Tip: With young choristers, explain that dynamics are all Italian words and encourage them to use Italian accents when they say them. To emphasize what they mean, try speaking them at the appropriate dynamic level, e.g. whispering *pianissimo* and shouting *fortissimo* with the other dynamics graded in between. You can even attempt saying *crescendo* and *diminuendo* while getting louder or softer accordingly!

Understanding the music we sing

An enjoyment of making music is absolutely vital when we sing in order to produce a performance with ‘heart and soul’ but your singers also have a job to do. Their aim is to communicate the music and its meaning as best they can to those who are listening.

Although there is no specific target for this at White Level, your youngest and most inexperienced singers need to be encouraged right from the outset to think about the meaning of the words they sing, and the mood of the music itself. From Light Blue Level onwards there are targets to develop this understanding but by introducing your White level singers to this concept now, you are laying firm foundations which will be beneficial later on.

When working on a new piece with your singers you need to think about the following two aspects:

1) The text

The music has been set to words (or lyrics) for a reason. There is a message to be put across. This can only be effectively communicated if your singers understand the meaning of the words. At the most basic level check that your singers can pronounce all the words, and with young singers in particular make sure they also understand what the words mean. Ask if there are any words they are unsure of. If the words are in a foreign language you will need to provide a translation. However, even if the words are in English, don’t just sing them without asking your singers the following questions – what do you think these words are about? What mood, meaning or story are they putting across? How can we help put this across when we sing it? Involve them in deciding whether certain dynamics might help communicate the message more clearly for example.

Tip: Ask your singers to imagine that they are telling an important story every time they sing. They need to try and capture the imagination of the people who are listening to them. The diction, dynamics, and breathing will all contribute to the performance.

2) The music

If the words were the only important part of a song or anthem, you could just read them aloud like a poem or a bible reading without any music at all. But the words have been set to music for a reason: to help express a particular mood or meaning. Every time you go through a new piece, think about the mood of the music as well as the meaning of the text. What mood is the music trying to convey? How can you put this across as effectively as possible in your performance?

Tip: When a singer or choir performs on ‘automatic pilot’ (i.e. without thinking about what they are doing) not only are mistakes more likely, but the performance is likely to be lacking in expression. Right from the beginning, even with your youngest singers, aim to help your singers to think about why they are singing what they are singing, and what they are singing about.

New choir members

Welcoming new choir members

It is important that singers feel welcome in a choir, and that the atmosphere is friendly and supportive. This will help ensure that your singers remain members of the choir for years to come, and will also provide the kind of atmosphere where the choir members can learn new skills without fear of ridicule. When you have new members of the choir:

- Welcome them formally at their first rehearsal and introduce them by name to the rest of the choir. Ask your other singers to make them feel welcome.
- Ask a more experienced member of the choir to act as a mentor to your new singer. (Make sure you have asked them privately before you introduce them!) Your mentor will sit next to your new singer helping them to understand what they are singing, how to follow the score, where to sit, and will also be a friendly face if they don't know anyone else.
- Make sure you have been clear about your expectations regarding attendance, rehearsal times, choir dress, etc. Giving your singer (or their parent, if it is a young singer) the rehearsal/performance/service dates and times in writing is incredibly useful, and makes sure everyone knows exactly what is expected.
- You might like to invite your new singer to arrive slightly early for the first rehearsal (and ask their mentor to come at the same time) so you can explain briefly where they will sit, give them their music, explain about choir dress (if you robe for example, where they can find their robe and how to put it on.) Your mentor is also there to go over anything again as necessary.
- Explain any other choir routines/duties they will be taking part in – e.g. how to follow the service in the prayer book, and which bits they join in with, how to process into church, where to put their music away at the end of the rehearsal, and so on. For something relatively complicated like processing into church at the start of a service, you might like to give them a practice run either just with their mentor, or with the whole choir. (It will give you a chance to correct any bad habits the rest of the choir have picked up!)
- For church choirs, if there are certain prayers they will be joining in with at every service, it would be good to show them these prayers in the service book and give them a chance to read them aloud (or even take them home to practice for young children).

Tip: With youth choirs you might even like to play an ice-breaker game to get everyone relaxed and help them learn names!

New choir members

Admitting new members to the choir

In many church choirs a new member is considered a 'probationer' until they have learnt the ropes and can show a certain level of competency in their singing, behaviour and understanding. They are then admitted formally as full members of the choir. Once your singer has completed their White Level targets, they are ready to be admitted as full members of the choir.

The way you choose to mark this admission to full membership will depend on the kind of choir you are running. However, trying to have some kind of formal admission will make it very special for the singer in question, and parents or friends will be delighted to share in the event. This also acts as a good incentive for other new singers to join and work hard on their White Level targets so they can also become a full member of your choir!

If you are running a church choir, you can include the admission to the choir as part of one of your services. There is a short office for an Admission to the Choir available from the RSCM which includes some prayers for the singer and the choir as a whole. If you are a school choir or community choir you may like to make your formal admissions as a part of a concert, or perhaps at an annual choir party.

There is an RSCM Admission to the Choir certificate you can present to your singer with a space for their name, the date and the name of the choir. You may also like to give them a small gift such as the *Voice for Life Chorister's Companion* – a small pocket book packed full of useful advice on all aspects of singing and worship.

Robed choirs often show this transition to full membership by presenting the singer with their surplice (worn over the top of the choir robes).

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