

Effective Rehearsals: Combining Artistry and Pedagogy

Rebecca B. MacLeod
University of North Carolina Greensboro

“The job of the orchestra teacher is to combine the best of studio teaching with the art of the finest rehearsals.”

Developing Ensemble Unity

Ensemble unity is at the center of every rehearsal and performance. String students should develop rehearsal skills/habits of mind in five key areas: Breathing, watching, counting, listening, and matching. These habits should be executed in tandem with the conductor.

Breathing: We want our students to engage with one another before a note is ever played. This should be done through both breath and movement. I like to encourage students with a visual goal of a 6” scroll or head lift. Timing is essential and the breath cannot occur without subdivision.

Student Activities

Follow the Leader. Perform a memorized song in unison with a variety of dynamics and articulations. Assign a leader to prep, breathe, and communicate changes in style, dynamics, articulation and tempo.

Pass the beat. Arrange the ensemble to encourage eye contact. Designate a student to begin the game by plucking 4 clear beats, makes direct eye contact with an individual, and visually passes the quarter notes to that student. The student may choose to keep the quarter notes for as many beats as they like, then pass to another student in time as long as they are clear! This means, they must keep a steady pulse, make clear eye contact, and prep on the beat prior to passing the note.

Start without the Conductor: Assign different students throughout the orchestra to start a musical passage without the conductor nonverbally. Transfer the role to different players to encourage all students to breathe and lead from front to back of sections.

Teacher Activities

Play Now. Practice the preparatory conducting gesture by tossing a ball while thinking, “Play now.” The ball is tossed on “play” and caught on “now.” If the conductor wants the musicians to breathe, then they must also breathe. Imagine a portion of the melody in time leading up to your preparatory beat. You can also consistently subdivide prior to the prep.

Watching: Visual cues are incredibly helpful to string players because not only can we see the conductor’s gesture, we also can see the bow stroke of our fellow players. String players must learn to watch for bow placement, articulation, and bow speed.

Student Activities

Toss a Ball. Toss a ball into the air and have students clap or pizzicato as you catch the ball. Tossing the ball should be just like the conductor’s preparatory beat. Transfer this activity to the conductor’s baton.

Mirror Game. Students should stand and face their partner with both hands raised palms facing each other. One student leads by slowly moving their hands as the other student moves as a mirror. This activity hones students’ visual awareness, reactivity, and ability to use peripheral vision.

Teacher Activity

Eye Contact. Look at the students and they are more likely to look at you. Spend time conducting something for which everyone has the music memorized, similar to *Follow the Leader*.

III. Élégie.

Laughetto elegiaco. (♩ = 69.)

The musical score is written for piano and celesta. It consists of three systems of music. The first two systems are marked "Laughetto elegiaco. (♩ = 69.)". The piano part is marked "pp" and the celesta part is marked "pizz.". The third system is marked "Poco più animato." and "molto cantab.". The piano part is marked "p" and the celesta part is marked "pizz.". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Counting: Teachers regularly ask students to subdivide, but do students know what that means? Constant subdivision requires mental energy and discipline. Students need audible examples and need to demonstrate the ability both audibly and internally.

Student Activities

Human Metronome. Isolate a passage and have inside players perform the smallest note value of the passage (generally sixteenth notes) on the tonic while the outside players perform the passage as written. Encourage students to watch and listen to the sixteenth note bows. For a more challenging activity, have students perform the melody using the smallest note value.

Insert Rests: Strategically place additional rests in a difficult passage. This helps students maintain control in difficult passages creates a sense of calm and curbs the tendency to rush.

Play Only the Down Beats: Yep, play only the down beats and imagine the rest.

Teacher Activity

Humans are notoriously bad at keeping time. This is why we wear watches and look at clocks all the time! Practice audiating the score with the metronome on. In the reverse, imagine the tempo you want, then use the tap function to check your tempo.

8

Handwritten musical score for measures 141-149. The score is for five staves: Vln 1, Vln 2, Vla, Vc, and Db. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score includes various dynamics such as *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte). There are handwritten annotations including 'div.' (divisi) and 'unis.' (unison). Measure numbers 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, and 149 are written below the staves. A large 'X' is drawn over the first few measures, and a box labeled 'H' is drawn around measure 145. There are also some handwritten notes and markings on the staves.

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Handwritten musical score for measures 150-156. The score is for five staves: Vln 1, Vln 2, Vla, Vc, and Db. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score includes various dynamics such as *f* (forte) and *pizz.* (pizzicato). There are handwritten annotations including 'V' (crescendo) and '2' (second ending). Measure numbers 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, and 156 are written below the staves. There are also some handwritten notes and markings on the staves.

Listening: The key to teaching students to listen is to teach them how to listen, and to whom they should listen (e.g. The melody, rhythmic motor, bass line).

Intonation Detective: Choose one or two students to play detective and send them out of the room so they are not privy to the ensemble's discussion. Then select a student, or students, to intentionally play out of tune. Bring the students back to rehearsal and have them locate the out of tune students.

The Rule of Octaves. The rule of octaves states that, "the lower octave is louder than the upper octave by a 3:1 ratio." Have students listen for all moments of octaves and adjust their balance accordingly.

Imposters Among Us? Similar to the intonation detective, select students to deliberately play a rhythm inaccurately, or deliberately rush. Have classmates vote to find the "imposter among us."

Teacher Activity

Score prep and know what you want. Consider the role of each part. Is it the melody, countermelody, motor/engine, harmony? Which section of the orchestra is playing the role of leader at any given moment?

Matching: Students must learn to adjust to what they hear and see! Matching goes hand in hand with listening and watching.

Bow Twins: Have students face one another and play a memorized passage while staring at their partner's bow. They should strive to have their bows look identical as they play.

Share a Bow: This exercise helps students play with precision, similar bow length, and speed. One student holds the bow at the frog and the other student holds the same bow towards the middle. Important - both students must use their bow hand for this activity to transfer. Have students shadow the passage. If they are not in time, they will kinesthetically receive feedback until they match one another's rhythm, energy, and bow length.

A handwritten musical score for a string ensemble, measures 45 through 50. The score is written on five staves: Vln 1, Vln 2, Vla, Vc, and Db. The key signature is one sharp (F#). Measures 45-48 show a melodic line in the violins and a rhythmic motor in the violas, cellos, and double basses. Measures 49 and 50 feature a crescendo for all parts. Handwritten annotations include 'cresc.' above the measures and '45', '46', '47', '48', 'cresc. 49', and '50' below the staves. There are also handwritten 'V' marks above some notes in measures 45-48.

Teacher Activity

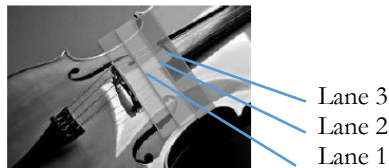
Determine what style and articulations (bow speed, bow placement) are needed, and watch the ensemble carefully so that you can identify who is executing the passage most beautifully/accurately. Identify students from all parts of the orchestra to model and reinforce watching/matching. As yourself these questions: 1) Where should students be in the bow to start the phrase? 2) What type of color do I want (then decide contact point)? 3) Where should students be in the bow at the high point of the phrase?

Relationship Between Conducting Gesture and Bow Arm

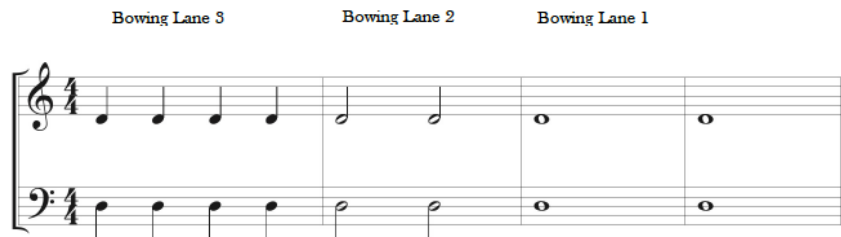
Shape • Color • Points of Emphasis • Dynamic Shading • Contour and Contrast

Three variables (speed, weight, and contact point) work together to produce a quality tone on a string instrument and allow the player to create a variety of tone colors.

Three bowing lanes. The lanes control dynamics and/or tone color.



Play the exercise below maintaining *mf* dynamic.



Exercises to Connect Conducting Gesture and Bow Arm Principles

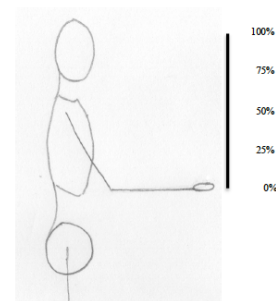
In gesture, the relationship of speed and space creates the illusion of weight.

Flexible Speed, Constant Space, Changing Weight: If the amount of space remains constant, and the number of beats traveled decreases, speed *increases*, creating an illusion of gradually lighter weight.

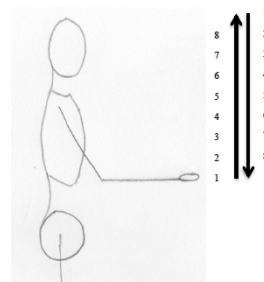
8 counts up, 8 counts down = heaviest weight
1 count up, 1 count down = lightest weight

Constant speed, Flexible Space, Changing Weight: If the rate of speed remains constant, and the number of beats traveled decreases, space *reduces*, creating an illusion of gradually heavier weight.

4 counts up/down (100% of space) = heaviest weight
1 count up/down (25% of space) = lightest weight



“Painting” a Wall. Imagine your hand is a paintbrush and you are painting on a white wall with vividly colored paint. As you paint, move from the middle of the wall toward an imaginary doorframe, observing how the variables of speed, space, and weight naturally change to avoid getting paint on the doorframe.



CHINESE FOLK SONGS

For String Orchestra

Zhou Long, arr.

Lan hua-hua

Shaanbei

Melancholic

Moderato

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello
Double Bass

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 13 14 15

21 22 23 24

f *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

f *p* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

f *p* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

f *p* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

pizz. *arco* *p* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

mf *pp* *mf* *mp* *pp* *mf* *mp* *pp*

mf *pp* *mf* *mp* *pp* *mf* *mp* *pp*

mf *pp* *mf* *mp* *pp* *mf* *mp* *pp*

pizz. *arco* *p* *mp* *pp* *mf* *mp* *pp*