

The TMEA Guide to Plan, Practice & Nail Your Next Audition



In this guide, we'll be covering some of the super cool and handy stuff I wish I knew when I was doing the TMEA process.

So let's do this! :)

Supplies

Here is a quick checklist you'll want to have ready to go to plan your practice starting in late May (or whenever you start):

1. Binder
2. TMEA Sheet music
3. Highlighter
4. Pencil
5. Calendar (smartphone calendar totally works)
6. Alarms & Reminders Apps handy
(or whatever you use to remind yourself of super important stuff ;)
7. Headphones

Once you got all of that together,
highlight your vocal part.

Practice Plan

Step 1

Pick one of Your TMEA audition pieces

Step 2

Number all the measures to your song

Step 3

Figure out how many weeks until your next audition*

***If you can't find out the date for some reason, the earliest audition date is in late September, so pick a day around that time then adjust as soon as you know for sure**

Step 4

Assuming you practice four days a week, calculate how many total practice days you'll have before your first audition.

Step 5

Divide the number of measures by the number of practice days you'll have before your first audition.

Step 6

The number of measures you get is how much you'll need to learn each practice day.

Step 7

Put reminders in your phone, calendar and set up alarms to be reminded daily (that way if you miss a day, you'll be reminded again without having to remember). Repeat with all songs.

Step 8

Each day, after learning your set of measures, review all past measures you've learned so far, with special attention to tricky measures.

Practice Plan Example

Step 1

Let's Say One of Your Example Pieces is "Hallelujah"

Step 2

Number each Measure to Hallelujah, let's say it has 50 measures.

Step 3

Let's say you have 9 weeks until your next audition, and you'll be practice 4 days a week.

Step 4

If you practice four days a week, for 9 weeks, that's a total of 36 practice days before your audition.

Step 5

With 50 measures to the song in total, you'd take 50 divided 36 which equals 1.38 measures.

Step 6

1.38 measures is an awkward amount to plan to learn each day, so let's go with two measures each day. Repeat 1-8 with all songs.

Step 7

Put several reminders of that practice goal so that all your effort can go towards *practicing* vs. remembering to practice.

Step 8

On day one, you would learn and practice the first two measures, on day two, you'd practice the next two measures and then review what you'd learned on day one. Now let's say the second measure was especially tricky, in that case, spend a little more time on that measure.

Sight Reading Tips & Resources



Sight Reading skills are crucial to your success in the TMEA audition process, so do a little bit every practice day. Since the topic of Sight-Reading has been covered really well already, you can check out the resources below, plus some of my own tips that I don't see mentioned that often.

Tip 1:

Watch how you react to mistakes in your sight-reading. Do you stop? Do you judge yourself? Do you stop to judge yourself? Check out the Singer Super Powers in the next pages so that you get really good at bouncing back after missing a note.

Tip 2:

Rhythm is generally a tough skill for us to learn as singers because we don't really feel a big difference between different rhythms. Drummers on the other hand, literally hit something every time they accentuate a rhythm! So when you want to give special focus to rhythm, make strong gestures like clapping, stomping, etc.

Tip 3:

For each day that you practice, try to "get to know" a new rhythm and or pitch combo that you might have missed in your exercise. For instance, if you miss a dotted quarter note going from "re" to "fa" (or whatever scale system you use) do as many dotted quarter note rhythms as you can throughout the day with as many variations of solfeggi syllables. Same thing but in reverse with "re" to "fa".

Resources:

1. <http://www.bwoodchoir.org/SRPractice.html>
2. <https://sightreadingfactory.com>
3. <http://www.penders.com/p-263099-90-days-to-sight-reading-success.aspx>

Nail Every Entrance

One of the trickiest parts of the TMEA music is often the entrances. If you spend all your attention on the singing, you'll miss the all-important silences where you can hear the music and find your spot. So here are some top tips to fill in the rests with sounds and movements so that:

1. Your mind doesn't wander off and lose track
2. You stay totally engaged in the music between your sung phrases.
3. You can check in with your air to make sure you've breathed in for the next phrase.
4. You have multiple landmarks in your music that help you get back on track if you lose count.

Tip 1: Make Sound On the Rests

Listen to the singer on your practice track. Instead of singing with the singer, only count the rests, loud and proud, between each sung phrase that the singer sings.

Make sure you count loud and proud! Barely whispering the counts ensures lots of doubt on which count you are in. Of course, during the audition you don't want to count out loud, but not counting out loud or representing the rests in some way gives your mind time to wander off and lose track of where you are at in the song. Once you can accurately predict when the singer is going to come in with the correct beats, singing with the piano track will be a lot easier, as will counting silently.

More Entrance Tips

Tip 2: Once You Have Practice Tracks, Track Entrances

Track the exact second on your track that the singer comes in for any tricky entrances. This will give you a way to practice right at the point in the song that's tricky, rather than singing through the entire song every time you want to practice just that one entrance. This also gives you another way to double check if your entrance was correct when you work with the piano track.

Tip 3: Count the Total Number of Beats Between Entrances

Does the composer seem to not be able to decide what time signature the piece will be in? Some pieces switch from 3/4 to 5/4 to 12/8 to 132/4. I would often lose count between each sung phrase because I would get lost on which 3/4 or 5/4 I was on. To make this easier, you can count consecutively. For instance, if there are 33 beats before you come in, count from 1-33.

Quiet Your Inner Critic by Using Two Singer Super Powers!

Where is your attention when you sing? Is it on the message, sounds, emotion and sensations of the song or is your attention on how well you are doing and whether or not you are “good” or “bad” singer?

There are 2 powerful ways to begin to turn down the volume on your inner critic, which we'll call “The Judge” for short. So let's check those out!

Singer Super-Power Number 1:

Practice Re-Directing Your Attention Away From Your Judge

Everyone has an inner critic, or “the Judge” as mentioned in Positive Intelligence by Shirzad Chamine (great book :) The Judge is part of your brain, and part of everyone's brain. It's always there judging you, other people, and circumstances. When you sing, the more attention you can take away from your judge, the more focused you can be on the actions needed for the song. So to practice giving both what your musical instrument deserves (undivided attention) and see past that judge, you want to practice directing your attention.

The more you direct attention away from the non-essential thoughts in your head and towards the essential sounds, sensations, emotions and message of the song, the more successful you will be as a singer. So when you sing, practice paying attention to one of these things instead of non-useful judgements about your singing. To practice this, use any sensation whatsoever that you bring your attention to *while* letting go of thoughts. Check out the next page for a list of options.

When The Thoughts in Your Head Aren't Helping You, Get Out of Your Head.

Here's a list of different sensations you can pay attention to so that you can practice bringing your attention away from self-criticism and towards the living, breathing music in front of you.

Directing Attention Exercise 1

Notice what your feet are doing while you sing. Where is your weight distributed on your feet? Front? Side? Back?

Directing Attention Exercise 2

Notice the ribs at the side while you sing. Are they moving? Tense? Relaxed?

Directing Attention Exercise 3

Scan through every muscle in your body and notice the level of movement, tension, relaxation without trying to change anything.

Directing Attention Exercise 4

Notice any physical sensation whatsoever while you sing. Every time your mind wanders, bring your attention back to a physical sensation. It can be touch, smell, sounds, sights, etc.

“Shouldn't I Only Be Paying Attention to the Music Though?”

Although in general you want to focus on the senses directly related to singing (like hearing), focusing on an unrelated sense (like smelling) can be a really awesome way to test how deeply you've learned your music, so don't be afraid to focus on other sensations on occasion. Sometimes singers are really tempted to judge their singing when they focus on sensations directly related to singing, so focusing on something else is an awesome way to let your muscle memory do its thing without micro-managing. It's really similar to the idea of “trying” to fall asleep. If you try too hard, you'll stay awake, if you focus on something else though, it can happen naturally.

Singer Super Power Number 2: Self-Compassion? Really?!

The most powerful attitude to succeed as a singer: Self-Compassion. Yes, really. Don't make me pull out the research and hundreds of studies! I will! Better yet, Check Out the book "Self-Compassion" by Kristin Neff.

No, it's not confidence. **Confidence is one of the most unstable feelings ever.** When you make a mistake, you lose it. When you try to boost it, you accidentally put other people down. Instead, focus on being compassionate towards yourself when you make a mistake...why is that?

Compassion helps you get back up and try again! Think of it this way, if you are singing and you make a mistake and then you begin to pay attention to all the judgmental thoughts about that mistake and generate more worrisome thoughts about it, then your attention has wandered away from paying attention to what you are doing...like counting between sung phrases.

Compassion on the other hand, enables you to see that you made a mistake, realize you are human, say to yourself "it's okay" and immediately get back in the action. It's like bandaging a warrior before sending him back into battle. He now has a stronger defense because of that little bit of kindness and that little bit of care. Imagine if a warrior got stabbed in a war, and then blamed himself and started punching himself in the face and then went right back to war. Is he in a better place now to win? Of course not.

What to Tell Yourself When You Make a "Mistake"

Step 1 Recognize What Happened:

"Oh, I Missed That Note."

Step 2: Remember, You're Not Perfect, Neither is Anyone Else.

"Hey Self, Welcome to the Human Race, We All Make Mistakes, It's Okay, Breathe ;)"

Step 3: What's the Most Kind and Useful Thing You Could Do Now?

"What's the Best Next Step I Can Take Right Now?"



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