Group Sight-Reading Assessment: Guidelines, Procedures and Scoring

VCDA Sight Reading Committee 2023-2026

CJ Redden-Liotta, Chair
Falls Church High School
District 10
cjreddenliot@fcps.edu

Alicia Brodt
Bull Run Middle School
District 9

Rebecca Cooper
Central High School
District 14

Tim Drummond
Moody Middle School
District 1

Melissa Legge Mauck
James Wood High School
District 14

Heather Perryman
O.T. Bonner Middle School
District 6

Felix Polendey
Parkside Middle School
District 9

Christen Reddig
Rachel Carson Middle School
District 12

Daniella White
Franklin Military Academy
District 1

Sight-Reading Levels

Five levels of sight-reading are available for groups to perform, with at least three different examples in each level and voicing. At check-in, directors will have the opportunity to quickly preview the different examples and choose the sight-reading example for their ensemble(s). Directors may not choose the same sight-reading example for multiple groups that share students.

The performance level is based on the lowest graded selection if your selections are one level apart or the level between your two selections if your graded selections are two levels apart in difficulty. If your ensemble has only one graded selection, then that graded selection will be used to determine your sight reading level. An ensemble may sight read above their literature level at the director's discretion.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">High School & Middle School Sight-Reading</th></tr>
<tr><th>Performance Level</th><th>Sight-Reading (non Blue Ribbon)</th><th>Sight-Reading (Blue Ribbon)</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td rowspan="3">At least level 1</td><td>At least level 1</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>At least level 1</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>At least level 2</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td rowspan="3">At least level 2
At least level 3
At least level 4</td><td>At least level 3</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>At least level 4</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>At least level 5</td></tr>
</table>

Sight-Reading Procedure with Script

After the ensemble has received the sight-reading exercise from the assistant, the adjudicator will state the following, ***reading verbatim from the script:***

> *"Welcome to the sight-reading portion of your district performance assessment. Please keep your sight-reading exercise face-down until I tell you to turn it over to begin. You will have two minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality. During the study period, you may sing alone, with one another, or in sections per your director's instructions. However, you may not demonstrate TO one another. Student use of personal devices is prohibited."*

The adjudicator will then ask the director if they have questions about the procedures. Barring none, the adjudicator will instruct the director and students to turn over the exercise and establish tonality. The director has up to one minute to establish tonality. Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality. During each study period, the adjudicator will notify the ensemble when they have one minute remaining and thirty seconds remaining.

Two Minutes Pass

> *"Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading."*

At the end of the first two minutes, the ensemble will perform the sight reading exercise. The director has up to one minute to re-establish tonality.

Upon completion of the first attempt, the adjudicator will ask the director if they would like to use the initial performance for assessment. If they do not, continue the script.

> *"You will have two additional minutes to study the sight-reading"*

The second study period begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality or the director begins to give feedback to the ensemble. The ensemble may choose to perform the sight reading exercise before the end of the two minute study period.

Two Minutes Pass

> *"Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading."*

The ensemble will perform the sight reading exercise again. The second attempt will be the only one scored by the adjudicator.

Following the second performance, the adjudicator will thank the ensemble and collect the exercise.

> *"Thank you. Please wait until we have collected all the sight-reading forms before you exit the room."*

Procedure as a Chart

Event/Time Elapse	The Director May: (in any order)	Students may: (in any order)	The Director May Not:
Study Periods 2 minutes each	• Establish tonality using piano and/or voice for no longer than one minute. • Provide students with starting pitch(es.) Directors may sing solfege and/or demonstrate Curwen/Kodaly hand signs for the starting pitch(es) only. • Provide the tonality during the study period using only the piano by playing the tonic pitch or blocked tonic triad. • Establish tonality by having the ensemble sing scales, patterns, and/or progression. • Allow the ensemble to chant through rhythms in the example (using a counting system or solfege) in its entirety, but only once. There is to be no stopping during the chanting, nor is there to be group chanting of only select measures. This is included in your study period time.	• Chant, clap, or sing individually, in groups, in sections, or as an ensemble with student leadership. Students may sing <u>with</u> one another, but not <u>demonstrate</u> to one another. (i.e., individual students cannot teach the entire ensemble) • Establish tempo for a section or ensemble. • Rehearse the entire example or individual sections within the example. • Speak to other members of the ensemble to answer questions or clarify uncertainties • Use rhythmic syllables, solfege, numbers, or neutral syllables. • Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs	• Demonstrate rhythms or pitches (snap, tap, clap, hum, or sing) except to establish tonality • Mouth along with rhythmic syllables, solfege, or numbers. • Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs, except during the establishment of tonality and giving beginning pitches. (Students may use hand signs). • Rehearse areas of difficulty. • Provide any verbal coaching to the ensemble during the first study period. • Facilitate a run through of the sight reading example of any type or length with the choir. • Provide a metronome or other tempo keeping method for the ensemble.

Event/Time Elapse	The Director May: (in any order)	Students may: (in any order)	The Director May Not:
Study Periods 2 minutes each (continued)	• Only after the first run-through of the exercise and at the beginning of the second study period, directors may verbally identify errors without specific pitch, intervallic, or rhythmic information *(See Appendix for additional explanation of verbal coaching.)* • Use their own timer or ask the adjudicator for time remaining		
Run-Through or Final Performance (Minimum tempo quarter note = 60bpm)	• Establish tonality using piano and/or voice for no longer than 1 minute. • Establish tonality by having the ensemble sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions. • Provide students with starting pitch(es.) Directors may sing solfege and/or demonstrate Curwen/Kodaly hand signs for the starting pitch(es) only. • Set tempo and keep the ensemble together by snapping, tapping, clapping, counting, or conducting. • Have the ensemble sing the exercise without stopping	• Sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions as an ensemble to establish tonality. • Sing the exercise without stopping • Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs	• Sing along with the ensemble • Mouth along with rhythmic syllables, solfege, or numbers. • Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs • Give students any verbal cues once they have begun singing

Sight Reading Levels

Sight Reading will be offered in levels 1-5 at Assessment. Levels 6 and 7 will be provided to the programmers at Sight Reading Factory and examples will be added to the VCDA website for teachers to use during classroom instruction.

Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VDOE Equivalent Level	MS - Beginning	MS - Intermediate/HS Beginning	MS- Advanced HS Intermediate	HS Intermediate	HS Advanced	HS Artist	HS Artist
Tonality* **	C, Eb, F, G	C, Eb, F, G	C, Eb, F, G and their minor keys*	C, Eb, F, G and their minor keys*	C, Eb, F, G and their minor keys*	Any major or minor key.	Any major or minor key.
Starting Pitches	Start and end on low tonic	Start and end on low tonic	Pitches in the tonic triad with the lowest voice on the tonic	Pitches in the tonic triad with the lowest voice on the tonic	Pitches in the tonic triad with at least one voice on the tonic	Pitches in the tonic triad with at least one voice on the tonic	Pitches in the tonic triad with at least one voice on the tonic
Voicing	Unison	Unison	HS: 2 Part SA/TB/Mixed MS: Unison**	2 part (SA/TB/Mixed), 3 Part (SSA, TTB, SAB), or 4 Part (SATB)	3 Part (SAB, SSA, TTB) or 4 Part (SATB, SSAA, TTBB)	4 Part (SATB, SSAA, TTBB)	4 Part (SATB, SSAA, TTBB)
Range	Scale degrees 1-5	Scale degrees low 7-6	Scale degrees 7 below-8 (range of 9th)	Scale degrees 5 below - 8 (range of 12th)	Scale degrees 5 below - 8 (range of 12th)	Scale degrees 5 below - 8 (range of 12th)	Scale degrees 5 below - 8 (range of 12th)
Melody	Diatonic, no accidentals	Diatonic, no accidentals	Diatonic, no accidentals	Diatonic, #7 in harmonic minor.	add: b7 and #4, approached and resolved by step.		All accidentals are allowed approached and resolved by step.
Skips	Stepwise motion	Stepwise motion with one instance of the tonic triad (ascending only)	Add: Thirds within the tonic triad	Add: any interval within the tonic triad and thirds within dominant triad	Any interval of a third, perfect fourth, or perfect fifth	Add: any interval of a sixth	Any diatonic skips up to an octave
Meter	4/4	4/4 or 3/4	4/4 or 3/4	4/4, 3/4, 6/8	4/4, 3/4, 6/8	4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/2	4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/2

Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rhythm	W, Q, H, notes and rests, 8th note pairs on same pitch	Add: dotted half notes, paired 8th notes on different pitches	add: one instance of dotted quarter/8th pattern in each part	add: two instances of dotted quarter/8th patterns in each part, four eighth note groupings	same as previous	Add stepwise sixteenth notes.	All dotted rhythms
Syncopation	No syncopation	No Syncopation	No Syncopation	No Syncopation	Basic syncopation (eighth - quarter - eighth) is possible and moves by step	Syncopation is possible separated from 16ths	Syncopation is possible

* For level 3, 4, and 5, one minor key option will be given.

** Middle schools may request the High School 2 part sight reading from their assessment chair for level 3.

*** ANY Sight-Reading example may be performed in an alternate key to accommodate for vocal range. If the director chooses to establish a key other than the one given, they must notify the adjudicator prior to the first performance.

Clarification on Verbal Coaching

The director may:

- Identify measures with difficult material, either pitch or rhythmic, in it without providing the solution to the problem -
    - "Students, please notice the tricky rhythms in the second measure."
    - "Students, there is a problem with a skip in the fourth measure."
- Indicate in which voice part the problem is-
    - "The altos need to be careful of one specific pitch in measure three."

The director may not:

- Provide pitch, interval or rhythmic solutions to any part of the sight-reading example.
    - "In the first measure, there is a skip from *do* to *fa*, please make that correction. You are singing *do* to *mi.*"
    - "Be careful of the eighth note rhythms in measure seven. Remember, to count eighth notes like one-and, two-and, three-and, four-and."
    - "The third note in the last measure is *mi* not *re."*
- Practice with the students areas that are difficult or incorrect
    - "The pitches in measure three were incorrect, let's sing through it together."

When judging: The rule for verbal coaching is that teachers may not intentionally provide any answers for students during the entire process.

Appendix A

VCDA District Performance Assessment Sight-Reading Committee

In 2011, the VCDA District Assessment Sight-Reading Committee met to develop an initial plan for common state-wide criteria. In 2013, the expanded committee met to revise the standards, procedures, and scoring. The following is what this committee submitted:
The plan developed for school years from 2011 to 2014:

- For school year 2011-2012: These guidelines would apply ONLY to groups attempting to obtain Blue Ribbon status.
- For school year 2012-2013: all performing ensembles would be required to sight- read, regardless of Blue-Ribbon attainment, following the same guidelines.
- For school year 2013-2014: all schools would be required to sight-read and the standards for each of the four levels would be more rigorous, including, but not limited to, additional length, more difficult rhythms and skips, more voicings, etc.

In years following 2014, revision will take place every three years by a committee made of one member of the executive board, appointed by the VCDA President, and three district representatives. This committee will solicit suggestions from districts following their Performance Assessment and will make, if appropriate, suggestions to the VCDA body for revisions. In 2019, the sight reading committee surveyed the state in order to make adjustments to the document that would better suit the VCDA membership. An updated document, voted on at the November 2019 VCDA meeting, includes the committee's recommendation to not form a new committee until Spring 2021, thus allowing two years to pass using the approved revisions.

Appendix B

Recommended Reading compiled by the 2014 committee

Bluestine, E. (2000). *The ways children learn music.* Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.

Demorest, S. M. (2001). *Building choral excellence: Teaching sight-singing in the choral rehearsa*l. NewYork: Oxford University Press.

Gordon, E. E. (2003). *Learning sequences in music.* Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.

Krueger, C. (2011). *Progressive sight singing.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Articles

Demorest, S. M. (1998). Sightsinging in the secondary choral ensemble: A review of the research. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 137, 1-15.

Demorest, S. M. and May, W. V. (1995). Sight-singing instruction in the choral ensemble: Factors related to individual performance. J*ournal of Research in Music Education,* 43, 156-167. DOI: 10.2307/3345676.

Henry, M. L. (2011). The effect of pitch and rhythm difficulty on vocal sight-reading performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 59(1), 72-84. DOI: 10.1177/0022429410397199

Henry, M. (2001). The development of a vocal sight-reading inventory. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 150, 21-35.

Killian, J. N. and Henry, M. L. (2005). A comparison of successful and unsuccessful strategies in individual sight-singing preparation and performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 53, 51-65. DOI: 10.1177/002242940505300105

Norris, C. E. (2004). A nationwide overview of sight-singing requirements of large-group choral festivals. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 52(1), 16-28.

For more resources, refer to the bibliographies of these readings.