

# Grading & Assessment in the Performance-Based Music Classroom

*by Aaron Noë*



GRADING & ASSESSMENT  
IN THE PERFORMANCE-BASED  
MUSIC CLASSROOM

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	3	<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
		Grading & The Concert Cycle	26
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	5	Developing a Plan for Assessing & Grading the Concert Cycle	28
Evaluating the Level of The Ensemble	6	Pre-Concert Worksheet	30
Evaluating Your Ensemble (Rubric)	10	Assessing the Concert	33
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	11	Post-Concert Worksheet	40
A Comparison of the Traditional Classroom and the Performance- Based Music Classroom	12	Grading the Concert	44
Accurately Grading Student’s Daily Participation	15	Concert Performance Rubric	48
Developing Ensemble Skills	20	<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	49
Ensemble Skills Rubric	21	Additional Resource	49
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	22	Developing a Lesson Plan	50
Grading Performance Tests	23	Lesson Plan Template	53
Playing Test Rubric	25	Getting the Most Out of Warm-up	57
		Sample Teacher-Created Exercise	61
		State Assessment Rubrics	62

## INTRODUCTION

This project began in the 2011-2012 school year. I was in my second year of teaching at Riverbend High School when I was asked by an administrator about my grading policy. For over ten years, I had been using a somewhat subjective system to grade my students on their classroom participation. There was no set rubric being used, only the concepts and ideas gleaned from my years of experience. However, this type of subjectivity is not acceptable in the current educational climate of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We are in an era of standardized tests and the demand concrete data to justify student progress and accomplishment. This left me with the question of “How can I accurately measure the participation of my students in a performance based classroom?”

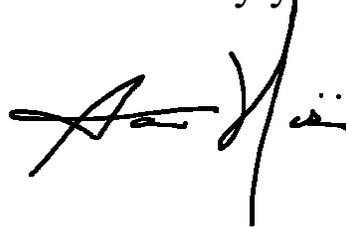
I began researching the subject and I found very little in terms of developing a rubric to accurately grade student success in the music classroom. Many books have been written on the value of testing in the performance-based classroom, but I found little information on the grading of daily routines which most music classrooms use in their rehearsals to prepare for concert performances. As a result, the task fell on me to develop a rubric to accurately assess the daily participation of my students in the music classroom. I researched common trends in education and compared the fine arts classroom to the traditional ‘core’ classroom. I found many similarities in grading among the various core subjects of math, sciences and literature. However, the dynamic of the core class is vastly different

from the performance-based music classroom. I experimented with various forms of assessment rubrics and eagerly sought the opinions of colleagues. I am indebted to the faculty of the Riverbend Fine Arts Department and my fellow band directors in the Spotsylvania School District for allowing me to bounce ideas, thoughts, rough-drafts and other questions off them to get feed back. To each of you, your input was invaluable!

The rubrics in this book are the result of research to better assess my students in my program. I have designed each rubric to assess the students based on a 100 point (percent) scale. If the rubrics presented in this book match your needs, I hope you will find them as useful as I have in developing an accurate assessment tool for the performance-based music classroom. It is my hope that each educator will use this as a source to develop his or her own system of grading which is appropriate and meaningful to their program.

I thank you for purchasing this eBook and I hope you find it useful!

Musically yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Noë', written in a cursive style.

Aaron Noë  
Conductor & Educator

CHAPTER 1:

EVALUATING  
THE  
LEVEL OF THE  
ENSEMBLE

## EVALUATING THE LEVEL OF THE ENSEMBLE

*Beginning of the year*

In preparation for each new school year, the director should take time to evaluate the skill level of the ensemble. Before selecting music, take time to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the ensemble. It is important to identify which sections have the stronger players and which sections struggle more with some of the ensemble concepts. When identifying strengths, be sure to identify individuals who may be strong enough to support a solo or perform a duet or small group. Identifying these players may aid the director in selecting music which showcases the talents of the stronger musicians in the ensemble.



Also be sure to consider the ranges and technical abilities of the principal players. If the euphonium section is not one of the strong sections, a director may avoid selecting repertoire which has strong melodic lines in that part. The range of the principal players may have an affect on the selection of repertoire. Knowing the range of the musicians will help to avoid any ‘mishaps’ or ‘cracked’ notes in the performance. Another consideration in range is the instruments the students are

# EVALUATING YOUR ENSEMBLE

ENSEMBLE: \_\_\_\_\_

ACADEMIC YEAR: \_\_\_\_\_

## STRENGTHS OF THE PROGRAM

STRONG SECTIONS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

STRONG INDIVIDUALS (Soloists, Duets, Small Groups, etc):  
\_\_\_\_\_

## RANGE OF PRINCIPAL PLAYERS IN EACH SECTION

### WOODWINDS

Flute/Piccolo \_\_\_\_\_

Oboe \_\_\_\_\_

Clarinet \_\_\_\_\_

Bassoon \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

### BRASS

Trumpet \_\_\_\_\_

Horn in F \_\_\_\_\_

Trombone \_\_\_\_\_

Euphonium \_\_\_\_\_

Tuba \_\_\_\_\_

## PERFORMANCE ABILITY OF THE GROUP

### RHYTHM LEVEL

Which level of Rhythmic Study can the ensemble effectively perform at sight?

I                      II                      III                      IV                      V                      VI

Which level of Rhythmic Study can the ensemble effectively perform with studying it shortly?

I                      II                      III                      IV                      V                      VI

Which level of Rhythmic Study can the ensemble effectively perform after writing in the counts and counting & clapping?

I                      II                      III                      IV                      V                      VI

Which level of Rhythmic Study includes rhythmic concepts beyond the current comprehension of the ensemble

I                      II                      III                      IV                      V                      VI

### SIGHT READING LEVEL

Which level does your ensemble currently sightread comfortably (Use your State's Rating System)?

I                      II                      III                      IV                      V                      VI

# CHAPTER 2:

## GRADING & ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE PERFORMANCE-BASED CLASSROOM

# **GRADING AND ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE PERFORMANCE-BASED CLASSROOM**

## **A Comparison of the Traditional Classroom and the Performance-Based Music Classroom**

The music classroom is vastly different from the traditional core classroom. When it comes to classroom management, student evaluation and individual grading, core subjects (like Math, Science, English and Social Studies) are almost identical. The greatest difference between them is the subject matter being taught. To the administration, there are immediate correlations in these classroom settings on these content areas. Although the material may be different, a math teacher can easily find similarities in the delivery of content by an English teacher and may even be able to offer suggestions and critiques.

In regards to classroom management, the core classroom yields an educator a variety of teacher-directed, student-directed, and independent learning strategies. Because of the student-directed and independent learning strategies, there are times a teacher may sit at his or her desk and work on something completely different from what the students are working on. The teacher may give the class an assignment and, while they are working, may be able to respond to email,



assist individual students, or begin planning for the next unit. The amount of time a core-area teacher is directly involved in teacher-directed learning may only be a small fraction of a given class period.

Grading also draws many parallels within the core subjects. Students are given daily classroom and homework assignments that are graded, and are periodically tested on a broader spectrum of content. In addition to the multiple graded assignments, some teachers may assign long-term assignments. In a given grading period, it is not uncommon for students to have over 30 daily/homework assignment and 5 or more test grades.



Now, compare the traditional classroom to the performance-based music classroom: in a given period or block, a music director will spend the vast majority of time in teacher-directed learning.

Because of the nature of the music class setting, the director does not have time to respond to email, individually assist or remediate while other students are actively engaged, nor is the director able to begin planning for the next unit. From the beginning of the rehearsal to the end, the conductor is most often engaged in student learning on the podium.

Differences in grading in the music classroom are also

## **Accurately Grading Students' Daily Participation in the Performance-Based Classroom**

A common problem encountered by the director of a performance-based classroom is, "How can I accurately assess regular, daily participation and assign a grade to a student, accordingly?" The answer comes in the development of a well thought-out concept of the important aspects of student participation with in the rehearsal/class. For the most part, directors agree that class participation in the performing arts should include 3 main categories:

1. Student Preparation
2. Active Participation
3. and Rehearsal Etiquette

### **Student Preparation**

When looking at Student Preparation, the obvious factors become apparent:

- Did the student bring his or her instrument?
- Did the student bring a pencil?
- Did the student bring his or her music?
- Did the student bring his or her valve oil?  
...reeds? ...mouthpiece? Etc..

# ENSEMBLE SKILLS EVALUATION FORM

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Week: \_\_\_\_\_

CONCEPT	CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION	SCALE	GRADE/SCORE
PREPAREDNESS	Student has Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Pencil</li> <li>• Instrument</li> <li>• Mutes, valve oil, reeds, sticks/mallets, etc.</li> </ul>	Never      Rarely      Occasionally      Often      Always 0 * * * * * 3 * * * * * 5 * * * * * 7 * * * * *	
	Musical Preparedness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student has practiced the music prior to rehearsal</li> <li>• Student has identified terminology and symbols in music</li> </ul>	Never      Rarely      Occasionally      Often      Always 0 * * * * * 3 * * * * * 5 * * * * * 7 * * * * *	
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION	Music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student rehearses the music in the ensemble during the class</li> <li>• Student use proper technique</li> <li>• Student performs with good sound</li> </ul>	Never      Rarely      Occasionally      Often      Always 0 * * * * * 5 * * * * * 10 * * * * * 15 * * * * * 20	
	Student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student listens to direction of the conductor</li> <li>• Student answers questions of the conductor</li> <li>• Student asks for clarification</li> <li>• Student understands new concepts</li> </ul>	Never      Rarely      Occasionally      Often      Always 0 * * * * * 5 * * * * * 10 * * * * * 15 * * * * * 20	
REHEARSAL ETIQUETTE	Music <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensemble</li> </ul>	Never      Rarely      Occasionally      Often      Always 0 * * * * * 5 * * * * * 10 * * * * * 15 * * * * * 20	
	Student's behavior during class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student refrains from talking during rehearsal</li> <li>• Student plays at appropriate times when directed by the conductor</li> <li>• Student marks music to indicate sections which need to be practiced or needs special focus.</li> </ul>	Never      Rarely      Occasionally      Often      Always 0 * * * * * 5 * * * * * 10 * * * * * 15 * * * * * 20	

SAMPLE

FINAL GRADE

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_