

This document is intended to be used in conjunction with the Official Rulebook and Evaluation Criteria, and not as a substitute for either. Download the Official Fine Arts Rulebook and the Evaluation Criteria at www.faf.ag.org/rules.cfm.

VOCAL ENSEMBLES

1. BE AN ENSEMBLE.

Don't present an arrangement that has a lot of solo parts with the rest of the group as background vocals. Be an ensemble – start off with full harmonies not a solo. In fact, as an ensemble, if there are no solo's at all, we won't miss it.

2. FIND THE RIGHT SONG TO SING.

Select a song and an arrangement the group can communicate with passion. Find a song that is right for the skill sets represented in your group (key, range, harmonic structure, etc.). The arrangement should be challenging enough to stretch you as musicians and vocalists but not so difficult that you are unable to master it.

3. COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

Learn the vocal and non-verbal physical cues of the other group members to help tighten the presentation's dynamics, diction, blend, intonation, cut-offs, etc.

4. COMMUNICATE WITH THE AUDIENCE.

By presenting a similar but energetic performance in terms of physical, vocal, and facial expression, no one person is more of the focus than the others in the ensemble. Even though you are an ensemble, you want to be unified in message and communication. For instance, you would not have one person clapping their hands and moving around the stage while the other singer is on their knees; or one person looking at the audience while the other singer has their eyes closed the entire time. It makes for an awkward presence on stage.

5. FACIAL EXPRESSION.

Quite often you will see an ensemble where six people will be enthusiastic and smiling while the one on the far left is pouty and looks like they are depressed or scared. Unfortunately, all attention tends to go to the one who "is not like the others". Video your rehearsal or sing in the mirror so that everyone in the ensemble can see where adjustments are needed.

6. WE WON'T MISS THE CHOREOGRAPHY.

Don't choreograph dance moves or hand motions unless you've fully mastered excellent vocal technique. No amount of choreography makes up for unsupported, flat, out-of-tune singing. If you choreograph movements and it's bad, we'll really notice it. If you don't do it, we won't miss it – we would rather hear simple and excellent vocal techniques and harmonies.

7. BLEND.

Listen closely to each other, and ask yourself, "Can I hear the other singers?". Work to match vocal texture, vibrato, intensity, push, dynamics, and intonation with other group members. If all people can hear is that dynamite tenor vocalist, then the group is not really functioning as an ensemble.

8. USE TRACKS OR INSTRUMENTS.

An a cappella entry is almost NEVER a good idea. Doing an a cappella piece leaves you vulnerable to a wide variety of pitch, rhythm, and tempo problems that very easily derail the presentation. Nerves affect pitch. Sound bleed-over from neighboring rooms impacts pitch negatively as well.

9. COORDINATE OUTFITS.

It is possible to coordinate colors, textures, and overall look without being overly "matchy, matchy." This may mean that everyone wears jeans and a solid shirt, or even a loose color scheme. By doing so you reinforce the group and not the individuals. No one should be wearing anything that draws attention to themselves.

10. WORSHIP GOD, NOT THE SONG.

When singing in a group that sounds and blends well together it is easy to fall in love with the musical sound. Remember that the music is an avenue through which we worship God. Make Him the focus, and He will bring unity to the group in a way that blend and matching costumes never can.