

“Thou Shalt Know Thy Score”

*The Ten Commandments of Teaching
Your Piece Through Score Study*

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Commandment #1

“Thou shalt hold a working understanding
of the composition’s form.”



- for planning rehearsals
- for identifying connection points and/or difficult transitions
- to incorporate large key center or modality shifts into every day rehearsals
- to incorporate meter proportion changes into daily rehearsals



Commandment #2

“Thou shalt bear mastery of all rhythm beat patterns.”



- to know all beat patterns in the context of macro, micro, subdivision, and borrowed meters
- to comfortably execute all meter proportion changes
- to embrace rhythm patterns for —
 - treatment of diction
 - rhythmically altered mid-phrase breaths
 - hard/exploded consonant releases



Commandment #3

“Thou shalt comprehend and contextualize
all tonal material.”



- by identifying all required scales/modes to be introduced
- by determining all chords/triads to be taught
- by isolating odd interval patterns
- by recognizing instances of chromaticism and its function
- by tracing each singer's part against the rest



Commandment #4

“Thou shalt engage the harmonic language
of the composer.”



- What makes the harmonic choices of Haydn distinct from Mozart?
- What makes makes Whitacre sound like Whitacre? Gjeilo like Gjeilo?
- What distinguishes a Kirchner arrangement from a Gibbs arrangement?



Commandment #5

“Thou shalt chart the harmonic rhythm of each phrase and the work’s phrases as a whole.”



- by identifying the rhythmic length of each chord
- in determining the function of each chord (passing, tension building, cadential)
- through observing the “vochestrations” complexity of each chord
- in determining how we will treat cadential points
- as we map out the schematics of both short & long passages for overall dynamic expression



Commandment #6

“Thou shalt use the harmonic rhythm in conjunction with the text’s natural stress points to pre-determine the shape of each phrase.”



- by mapping out the natural syllabic stress of the text (yes, English has syllabic stress patterns)
- in ascertaining how the natural syllabic stress aligns with the harmonic rhythm and the chord complexity/function
- through making phrasing decisions and vocal weight placement decisions based on these two things
- “Not all notes were created equal.” (Abraham Lincoln)
- Remember: unimportant syllables should be treated as truly unimportant



Commandment #7

“Thou shalt envision a vocal resonance palette appropriate to the style of the composition before the first rehearsal.”



- arriving at a decision on the type of vocal resonance you would like the piece to use —
 - more forward/bright
 - darker/more warm
 - overly nasal



Commandment #8

“Thou shalt map a curriculum for imparting the vocal skillset required to bring the score to its most beautiful reality.”



- by identifying instances where vocal development is required for —
 - register shifts/leaps
 - required vowel modifications
 - mixed voice for Tenors/Basses
 - unique diction issues
 - treatment of melismatic passages
 - realizing the spectrum of dynamics



Commandment #9

“Thou shalt engage the historical and cultural context from which the work took its genesis.”



- in undergoing research to honor standard performance practice of historical works
- by learning proper terminology to discuss music and compositional practices of music from other cultures
- researching techniques so as to pursue the highest levels of cultural authenticity
- in contextualizing the historical origin of the work you are performing to the World and/or American history your students are studying in other classes



Commandment #10

“Thou shalt identify the personal, communal, and societal relevance of the work’s text to yourself, the performers, and future audiences.”



- by interpreting how your texts demonstrate meaning to —
 - the human experience
 - common causes
 - moral good
 - upright living
 - citizenship
 - compassion
- in connecting your repertoire to the culture of your school and/or local community



Where now shalt thou goest?



- Use the form to develop a long-range rehearsal plan. What aspect and/or material will be rehearsed each meeting?
- Develop a baby-step sequence to explaining all rhythm beat patterns.
- Craft strategies for introducing the required scales/modes, chords, chromatic alterations.
- Map out a path for contextualizing each voice part against the pitch content of all other parts.



- Imagine efficient means for jumping from one composer's unique harmonic language to another within the same rehearsal.
- Inform your phrase length, breath, and text stress decisions on the harmonic rhythm.
- Do the hard work of informing yourself how to prepare historically accurate and culturally integral performances.



- Above all, teach your singers to sing healthily and beautifully by equipping them with all the vocal tools to effectively sing the repertoire you have chosen.
- Design vocalises, imagery, anatomically accurate explanations of how to achieve your desired vocal resonance.



- In advance of the first rehearsal, draw connections and parallels to the texts you will be preparing to the everyday lives of your students and the communities in which they live.



“Good score study begets good pedagogy.”

-Dr. Lerew



Questions & Answers

These slides and other resources supporting this presentation are available at ***thomaslerew.com/10-commandments***.



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