

HABITS OF A SUCCESSFUL STRING ORCHESTRA

TEACHING CONCERT MUSIC
AND ACHIEVING MUSICAL ARTISTRY
WITH YOUNG STRING ENSEMBLES

CHRISTOPHER R. SELBY

IN THIS SESSION,
ATTENDEES WILL LEARN:

- The common mistakes string teachers make with concert music, and how to avoid those detrimental pitfalls.
- The Seven String Ensemble Performance Objectives, and multiple strategies for teaching each one.
- Additional strategies for teaching students how to listen better to each other, to take greater ownership in their performance, and to develop greater independence as a musician.



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Think about your last concert or festival performance.
List some of the musical elements with which students continually struggle.

OUR BIGGEST MISTAKE

One of the most common and detrimental mistakes that orchestra teachers make is programming music that is too difficult for their students to learn and polish in the 8–10 weeks they have before the concert.

WHY DO WE DO THIS?

We want to challenge students, but we don't have a sequenced plan for teaching the technique that the challenging music requires.

So we try to teach new skills within the concert music instead of using well-sequenced exercises that are actually designed to teach skills like finger patterns, third position, and spiccato.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Challenge students during FUNDAMENTALS TIME and use concert music to teach students how to express clear musical ideas and styles as an ensemble through the performance of orchestral music.

Challenge students with exercises like:

- Three-octave scales, arpeggios, and thirds
- Velocity etudes, thumb position exercises
- Sight-reading in difficult keys and rhythmic exercises in compound meters
- Rhythmic bowing exercises with spiccato and sautillé strokes

LESSON PLAN

50% FUNDAMENTALS TIME
for introducing and reviewing skills

50% CONCERT MUSIC TIME
for teaching musical skills and ensemble skills

EXAMPLES OF SEQUENCED TECHNICAL EXERCISES

from *Habits of a Successful MIDDLE LEVEL String Musician*

13. Spiccato Exercises

Perform the spiccato stroke at the balance point; keep the thumb and pinky curved and the knuckles soft and fluid. Set the bow on the string during the eighth rests.

Musical notation for Spiccato Exercises 13, showing six exercises (a-f) in G major, 4/4 time, focusing on spiccato strokes.

14. Triplet Bowing Etude and Variations

Musical notation for Triplet Bowing Etude and Variations 14, showing the main etude and four variations (a-d) in G major, 12/8 time.

15. Sixteenth Notes and Slurs

Musical notation for Sixteenth Notes and Slurs 15, showing two staves of exercises in G major, 4/4 time, focusing on sixteenth notes and slurs.

CHALLENGING SEQUENCED EXERCISES IN SHARP AND FLAT KEYS

35. Position Etude in 1st Position

Musical notation for Position Etude in 1st Position 35, showing a single staff of exercises in G major, 4/4 time.

36. Velocity Drill #3

Musical notation for Velocity Drill #3 36, showing a single staff of exercises in G major, 4/4 time.

43. Finger Pattern Drill #5

Musical notation for Finger Pattern Drill #5 43, showing a single staff of exercises in G minor, 12/8 time.

44. Over the Highlands

Musical notation for Over the Highlands 44, showing a single staff of exercises in G minor, 4/4 time, including chord progressions (Cm, B^b, A^b, Gm, Cm, A^b) and first/second endings.

55. Through the Keys: A Cumulative Study of Lower Position Patterns

CHALLENGING SEQUENCED SCALE/ARPEGGIO EXERCISES

from *Habits of a Successful String Musician*

157. Scales and Arpeggios - One Octave

Two Octaves

Three Octaves

CHALLENGING SEQUENCED RHYTHM STUDIES AND SIGHT-READING EXERCISES

365.

366.

367.

MISTAKE #2

We tend to plan with our eyes and we fail to plan for all of the musical components that we cannot see. When we plan, we must remember to save enough time to teach the end game skills that are required in a polished and expressive performance.

- Blending tone and intonation
- Agreeing on the style and part of the bow
- Feeling the pulse together, even through an accelerando or at the end of a phrase
- Where is the high point of the phrase, the low point, and how loud are we in between?
- What is the character the composer intended, and what do we need to do to convey that character?

KEY POINT



**Teaching students how to play notes and rhythms
is not making music.**

THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONCERT MUSIC UNIT

The goal of teaching concert music is not to teach students how to read and perform notes and rhythms, or to play one's instrument "in tune" with a good tone and the right articulations. The goal of teaching concert music is to teach students how to perform all of these individualized skills with other players to convey a clear musical idea, to make music together with their instruments as an ensemble.

GOAL



**Students express clear musical ideas and styles as an ensemble
through the performance of orchestral music.**

We can break this goal into 7 ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES. Each ensemble objective is related to an individualized student performance objective for teaching rhythm, tone, intonation, dynamics, and musical expression. Let's look at these one at a time.

Performance Objective #1  ENSEMBLE RHYTHM

Perform accurate **rhythms** together within a synchronized **pulse** and a musically convincing **tempo**.

- Perform different rhythms together by feeling the pulse together, even through *accelerando* or *ritard*.
- Breathe at the end of the phrase and let others finish one phrase before starting the next.

What Questions or Strategies could be effective for teaching ensemble RHYTHM?

Performance Objective #2  ENSEMBLE ARTICULATION

Perform the same **bowings, articulations, and styles** in the same part of the bow as other members of the section. This includes more than just bowing in the same direction, but also using the same part of the bow and stylistic stroke.

What Questions or Strategies could be effective for teaching ensemble ARTICULATION?

Performance Objective #3  ENSEMBLE TONE

Use the same bow weight, speed, and contact point as other members of the section to create a well-blended ensemble **tone and timbre**.

- We must teach students to agree on bow weight, speed, and contact point to create **matching timbres** that blend together.
- Leaders must be taught to blend with their section.

What Questions or Strategies could be effective for teaching ensemble TONE?

Performance Objective #4  ENSEMBLE INTONATION

Finely tune one's own notes to be **in tune** with other musicians.

- Tuning to each other is different than “playing in tune.” Students must learn to tune their notes to another person's unison, octave, fifth, fourth, third, sixth, seventh, and second.
- Practice tuning to and blending with each other during tuning time.

What Questions or Strategies could be effective for teaching ensemble INTONATION?

Performance Objective #5  ENSEMBLE DYNAMICS

Use a **volume** that blends with the section, that **balances** the importance of one's own part with respect to the parts of other sections of the ensemble, and that agrees with other players through the peaks, valleys, and points in between of all **dynamics and phrasing**.

- Performing dynamics is different than agreeing on which note is the top of the phrase, and how loud it should be.
- Are students getting louder and softer at the same rate?
- Do students know who has the melody, and why that is important?
- Beware of the young teacher dynamics trap.

What Questions or Strategies could be effective for teaching ensemble DYNAMICS, BALANCE, AND PHRASING?

Performance Objective #6  ENSEMBLE TECHNIQUE

Breathe, move, cue, and perform **together in synchrony** with other musicians.

- Teach students to breathe and move together.
- Teach students to pay attention to their peer’s technique. “Is your stand partner...
 - Using good left- and right-hand technique?”
 - Bowing parallel to the bridge?”
 - Playing the right note/rhythm?”

What Questions or Strategies could be effective for teaching ensemble TECHNIQUE?

Performance Objective #7  ENSEMBLE MUSICAL EXPRESSION

Convey clear and **musically expressive ideas** that go beyond the notes on the page. These musical concepts include character, style, interpretation, beauty, intensity, mood, and emotion.

- What “story” is the music telling?
- What is the character or mood the composer wants?
- What do we need to do to convey that musical idea?
- What is your interpretation? Do you like his interpretation? Why or why not?

What Questions or Strategies could be effective for teaching ensemble MUSICAL EXPRESSION?

7 STRING ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES


When teachers use Fundamentals Time to teach individualized string skills, and when they program concert music of the appropriate difficulty, then they can spend rehearsal time teaching the 7 String Ensemble Performance Objectives (outlined on the previous pages and listed below). These objectives are universal; they can be printed onto a poster and displayed on a wall behind the teacher, and they can be used to teach string ensembles of any level.

Performance Objectives

Students must make the necessary adjustments in their individual performance to:

- #1.... Breathe, move, cue, and perform **together in synchrony** with other musicians.
- #2.... Perform accurate **rhythms** together within a synchronized **pulse** and a musically convincing **tempo**.
- #3.... Use the same bow weight, speed, and contact point as other members of the section to create a well-blended ensemble **tone and timbre**.
- #4.... Finely tune one's own notes to be **in tune** with other musicians.
- #5.... Perform the same bowings, articulations, and styles in the same part of the bow as other members of the section.
- #6.... Use a **volume** that blends well with the section, that **balances** the importance of one's own part with respect to the parts of other sections of the ensemble, and that agrees with other players through the peaks, valleys, and points in between of all **dynamics and phrasing**.
- #7.... Convey clear and **musically expressive ideas** that go beyond the notes on the page. These musical concepts include character, style, interpretation, beauty, intensity, mood, and emotion.

KEY POINT


Life gets much easier for teachers who create a year-long plan for teaching skills during Fundamentals Time and who use a fixed set of ensemble objectives for teaching new concert music. The curriculum stays the same, even if the music does not.

TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING ENSEMBLE SKILLS

The best way to develop ensemble skills ... STOP CONDUCTING.

Get off the podium and show students how to:

- Cue, move, and breathe together.
- Count for themselves and be responsible for their own entrances.
- Blend their tone with the tone of their stand partner.
- Follow and use the same bowings and part of the bow as the section leader.
- Share their own opinion for how the music should go.

A second important strategy for getting students to pay attention to each other and play together as an ensemble ... TEACH WITH QUESTIONS INSTEAD OF BARKING ORDERS.

- What part of the bow is your section leader using?
- What kind of tone is your stand partner creating?
- Does your C# march your section's C#? Is it in tune with the cello section's A?
- Who has the melody at m. 36? Who should lead the cue, and who should play softly?
- What is happening during your rest there?
- Where is the top of the phrase?

SEVEN CONDUCTING TIPS

1. Stop counting off. Click, prep, play!
2. Keep your pattern clean and simple. No jerks.
3. Conduct lines with your left hand.
4. Change it up. Use different tempos.
5. Do not follow the orchestra. Make them follow you.
6. If students don't understand a gesture, teach it.
7. Record yourself with a video camera.

SELECTING CONCERT MUSIC

What level of music is appropriate for my students?

- Select music with notes, rhythms, and articulation patterns that the students have already learned.
- Look beyond the notes, rhythms, and articulations, and ask yourself: “Can my students produce a great TONE on these notes, rhythms, and articulations?”
- Difficulty Guideline: Select music that is 1 to 2 difficulty levels lower than the level of the new skills you are introducing. DO NOT trust the publisher’s difficulty rating.
- Take into consideration the maturity level and popularity of a piece. Program slow pieces only if your students are mature enough to perform sustained notes with vibrato.

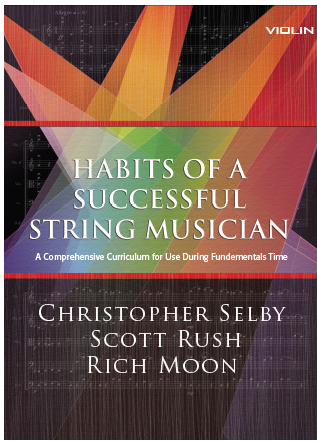
What are 2 indicators that the music is too difficult for my students?

- 1) _____

- 2) _____

CONCERT FESTIVAL DO’S AND DONT’S

Reflect on the Concert Festival Do’s and Don’ts.
Which stand out to you?



Habits of a Successful String Musician

A Comprehensive Curriculum for Use During Fundamentals Time

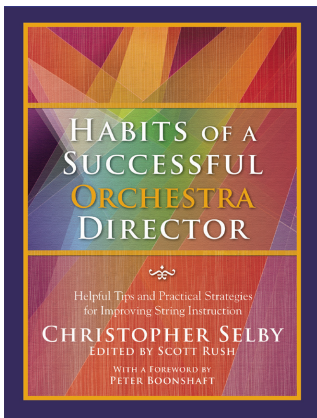
Christopher Selby • Scott Rush • Rich Moon

Habits of a Successful String Musician is a field-tested, vital, and - most important - musical collection of almost 400 sequenced exercises for building fundamentals.

Perfect to use with the entire string orchestra or solo player at virtually any skill level, this series contains carefully sequenced warm-ups, sight-reading etudes, rhythm vocabulary studies, chorales, tuning canons, and much more. In one place, this series collects everything an aspiring player needs to build fundamental musicianship skills and then be able to transfer those skills directly into the performance of great literature.

- Creates a method for teaching scales, arpeggios and thirds that simultaneously accommodates students of different ability levels.
- Organizes tone, rhythm and articulation patterns into a flexible and sequential series.
- Creates finger pattern and velocity studies that address the most common problems encountered by intermediate orchestra students.
- Provides beginning through advanced shifting exercises for students of every level.
- Creates exercises for learning alternate clefs and higher positions.
- Provides chorales for the development of intonation, tone quality, blend and musicianship.
- Presents rhythm charts in a new format that allows transfer from timing and rhythm to pitches in a musical context.
- Provides audition sight-reading in a classroom "full ensemble" format that is well planned in scope and sequence. There are over 130 sight-reading examples in this book.
- Promotes the idea

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Habits of a Successful Orchestra Director

Helpful Tips and Practical Strategies for Improving String Instruction

Christopher Selby • Scott Rush

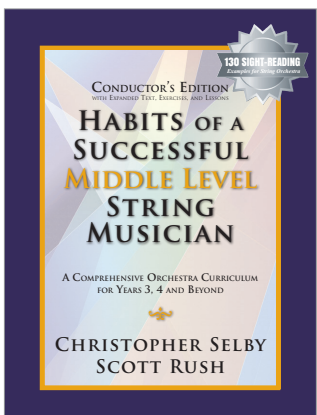
Christopher Selby and his team have created a resource that is rich with practical strategies for developing a successful orchestra program. This book will inspire young and veteran orchestra directors looking for fresh ideas about teaching orchestra students of all ages to:

- Perform with refined intonation, expressive musicianship, and a beautiful tone
- Develop advanced performance technique, rhythmic precision, and ensemble skills
- Sight-read better, rehearse more efficiently in class, and practice better at home
- Become orchestra leaders and take greater pride and ownership in your ensemble

Additional sections address rehearsal strategies, classroom policies, long-range planning, assessment, tips for building an orchestra program, and suggestions for communicating with parents and principals to better support the orchestra.

Habits of a Successful Orchestra Director is a comprehensive book designed to exponentially inspire as teaching skills grow. It will be a constant and essential companion throughout the career of any orchestra director.

G-9363 272 pages. \$29.95



NEW!

Habits of a Successful MIDDLE LEVEL String Musician

This edition offers additional etudes, drills and melodic exercises in a well-sequenced format that is designed to help students in their 3rd and 4th years of string education. It is organized into familiar units

1. Tone and Articulation
2. Finger Patterns and Lower Positions
3. Shifting and Upper Positions
4. Scales, Arpeggios and Thirds
5. Chorales—14 musical gems ranging in difficulty from Grade 2 to 4
6. Rhythm Vocabulary--
7. Sight Reading

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