

## Posture

Singers tend to use poor posture when sight-singing because they feel uncertain and off-balance. Good posture helps them sight-sing more effectively because it is easier to keep a steady beat and sing with confidence when the body is balanced.

### Activities for Posture

- 1) Have the singers balance their weight on one foot and sing; repeat with the body balanced on two feet. Notice the difference in the steadiness of the beat!
- 2) Have the singers sing while holding their music low; notice how hard it is to drop the jaw easily.

### REPEAT:

- i) Hold the music at a proper level; notice the difference in the jaw.
- ii) Hold the music low; notice how difficult it is to expand the ribcage.
- iii) Hold the music up; notice the difference in the ribcage.
- iv) Hold the music too high; notice the tension in the throat.

When singers hold their music at the right level:

- a) the jaw is automatically more relaxed and can open more fully;
- b) the throat is relaxed; and
- c) the ribcage can be expanded more easily.

*This book is dedicated to Deral Johnson. Soon after I began composing music, Deral looked me hard in the eye and said, "What we really need is some good, contemporary sight-singing material. Any chance you might be able to write some?"*

*Special thanks to Deral Johnson, Victoria Meredith and Carol Rogers for feedback and suggestions.*

### What Is Sight-Singing?

- reading a piece of choral or vocal music that you have never seen before, without the help of a piano or other singers.
- singing music for the first time with the words, pitches and rhythms as accurate as possible.

### POSTURE

**Body:** balanced (do not lean to either side)

**Head:** balanced and level (your jaw should not be pointing up or resting too close to your chest)

**Arms and Shoulders:** relaxed

**Music:** high enough so that you can see both the music and the conductor without having to move your head

### Standing

**Feet:** 1) spaced the same distance apart as the width of your shoulders;  
2) "rooted" in the ground (use the strength of your whole body when you sing)

**Knees:** slightly flexed (locked knees are too rigid)

### Sitting

**Body:** 1) straight and relaxed (do not lean against the back of your chair)  
2) sit "hard on the bones" to keep balanced and centered

**Feet:** flat on the floor (legs or ankles should not be crossed)

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# Sight-Singing Lessons

## THE BASICS

1



### INTRODUCE

staff  
notes

THE BASICS

1

staff

notes

The higher the notes are on the staff, the higher in pitch they will sound.

dominant

far away from home

**EXPLAIN:** The main part of the note is the oval, which may be black or white inside: ● ○

The note may have a stem. Right now, singers should ignore the stem. If the oval part is sitting high on the staff then the note will sound high in pitch:



**NOTE:** Do not presume singers already understand this concept. I once gave a workshop to about fifty non-readers (ages seventeen to eighty-six) who had been singing in choirs all their lives with printed music in their hands. When I demonstrated this concept to them, the looks of amazement were a wonder to behold! The most common comment was, "Why didn't someone tell me this before?" Within minutes they were able to improve their sight-singing remarkably. They now knew when they were making errors by moving the pitch in the wrong direction and were able to correct themselves.

It is interesting to note that there are many people who know this concept intellectually but do not automatically raise the pitch in their voices when they see a higher note on the staff. Some of these people are advanced students. They need more practice connecting the visual with the aural until it becomes automatic. Exercises 1 through 6 will be particularly helpful for them.

**WRITE** this example on a chalkboard or chart paper. **SING** the pitches on "dah" while pointing to each note:



**NOTE:** Always give the true pitch as written. Use a piano, tuning fork or pitch pipe.

## INTRODUCE

tonic (home)  
dominant (far away from home)

**SING** the tonic, dominant and tonic slowly on “dah.” Then have the singers sing the pitches. The music sounds complete or finished when the note arrives “home.”

The dominant and the tonic are the two most important pitches in most music in Western culture. Most melodies begin or end on the tonic most often. If singers always know where the tonic and dominant are, they cannot go too far wrong. They will be able to fit the rest of the pitches within the framework of the tonic and dominant.

### WRITE Exercise 1:

on a chalkboard or chart paper. Give the starting pitches (“do so do”). Point to each note with a steady beat as the singers sing (using the lyrics). Pointing trains the eyes to move steadily.

**NOTE:** In the exercises in this book, do not play the piano while the singers are sight-singing unless there is a written piano accompaniment.

### REPEAT Exercise 1:

- i) Without pointing.
- ii) Once again, encouraging the singers to:

- start each pitch exactly in tune;
- be brave and continue steadily without waiting for anyone else. Mistakes are permissible. Acknowledge the singers' courage!

### THE BASICS

1

staff		notes	
tonic	home	dominant	far away from home

The higher the notes are on the staff, the higher in pitch they will sound.

tonic	dominant	tonic
do	so	do

### Exercise 1

Gently *p* *mf* *p*

Lull-a-by, lull-a-by, lull-a-by loo; Lull-a-by, lull-a-by, lull-a-by loo.

2

quarter note		one beat
quarter rest		one beat

You do not sing during a rest but the feeling of the music continues, even without any sound. Try to feel the beat in the silence.

### Exercise 2

Lightly *p*

Part 1

Part 2

## Activity to Reinforce Tonic and Dominant

Before sight-singing or rehearsing a cappella pieces, always sing “do so do” (minor keys: “la do mi do la”).

See page 133 for more activities to reinforce tonic and dominant.

2



### INTRODUCE

quarter note (one beat)  
quarter rest (one beat)

See page 134 for activities to reinforce the feeling of a steady beat.

### WRITE Exercise 2:

on a chalkboard or chart paper. Sing “do so do” and have the singers sing one part at a time. Point to each note on the chalkboard with a steady beat. Encourage the singers to sing in tune.

### REPEAT Exercise 2:

- i) Without pointing. If the singers do not keep a steady beat, you may have to point a few times until they are steadier.
- ii) With the singers reading from their own books, pointing to each note themselves, encourage them to feel a steady beat.
- iii) Without singers pointing.
- iv) Have one group sing Part 1 while the other group sings Part 2.

**TIPS:** i) For right now, ignore the time signatures in each exercise. Teach the singers to concentrate on feeling one beat at a time:



It is easier to think “1 1 1 1, etc.” than “1 2 3 4, 1 2 3, 1 2 3 4 5, etc.” when there are changing time signatures.

As singers encounter music that is more difficult, the practice of feeling each beat one at a time becomes more and more valuable, especially if the tempo is quick. Encourage the singers to read by beat but feel the whole phrase.