

## New Member Weekly Visual Performance E-Mails

These e-mails cover the visual performance issues that sometime causes confusion or stress for our new members. If you can do them in different colors or with funny pictures, so much the better! The Welcome Letter goes out as soon as notification comes from the Membership Chairperson with their information. If you want, you can wait until after you've sent the vocal production e-mails or send them concurrently. If you are in the middle of the set with other new members and someone else joins, you can start them wherever you are in the process and take them back through the beginning when you've completed them all (that way you don't have to keep up with who gets which week's e-mail – up to you).

### Welcome E-Mail

Hi, (New member name)

I just wanted to touch base with you briefly – I'm your "Rookie Coordinator" with the \_\_\_\_\_ Chorus. You're now officially a Rookie with us!! You'll be called "rookies" until you compete with us at our next competition (or perform at a major show).

There is so much information to absorb when you're new!! If you prefer your information in smaller, bite-size pieces, I'll be sending you a series of what we call "Rookie Challenges". These are weekly (more or less!) tips that are taken from the information in our visual handbook. We suggest that you work on one aspect at each rehearsal.

If you have any questions, confusion or concern, please feel free to call or email me (give them your information here). It's exciting to have you as part of our chorus and a privilege to work with you as you begin this wonderful journey we call Sweet Adelines!

On with the show!

### Week #1 - Normal Chorus Position

Normal chorus position is to face our director, standing on the natural curve of the riser, with your feet toward the front of the riser and your body turned slightly to face her rather than the audience. Your outside foot should be slightly further forward. Your weight should be mostly on the balls of your feet – with weight distributed evenly on your outside foot. Your knees should be flexible and have some "give" in them. Your shoulders will be comfortable back and relaxed with the chest lifted high – singer's posture. Think of putting your shoulder blades into your pants pockets! Your head and neck are relaxed and somewhat "loose" – flexible. In fact, EVERYTHING about you will be comfortable and relaxed. However, you'll not be "floppy" – there is strength and command in this posture instead of bouncing all over your riser space.

You will find yourself standing up straight – straighter than usual probably! A visual image we sometimes use is the idea of having a string that runs through your head, neck and down your spine (like a puppet). You can "rise up" on that string to elongate and align (not stretch) your body into a singer's alignment. If you feel tension in your body, there will be tension and stridency in your vocal production. We want to be alert and responsive, but not tense. It does take some practice! It's a good thing to check yourself every once in a while during rehearsals and performances to see if you're tense or inflexible. If you have questions, please feel free to talk to one of our directors or section leaders to set up a PVI (personal vocal instruction). We're all here to help you be great!

That's your first challenge. Take a minute and practice what it feels like to stand in this way. Then "check in" as often as possible at rehearsal to see how you're doing!

## **Week #2 - Re-State**

You hear this word a lot at rehearsal. This means to rethink what you're doing and express it again – maybe tilt your head a fraction, increase or change your facial expression, increase your energy level, check your body alignment, or put a sparkle in your eyes!

Re-Staging means to remember what the song is all about and to come alive again with the meaning of the lyrics and music. Sometimes we let our bodies “settle back or settle down) and we need to re-state our good singing body alignment. Sometimes we get so involved in the techniques that we forget the words we're singing and the message. We need to refocus ourselves on reaching the audience with our message.

We often say “restate with every phrase) – that's a great habit to be in. Move a bit, pick up a foot and replace it, change your expression, let your arms move a bit. In short, re-state on each breath. It's what separates the really exciting choruses from the “okay” ones.

There may be specific times in the songs that the director or choreographer will ask us to always remember to restate. We just need to memorize those times. But if you're in the habit of doing it at each breath, you won't have to worry about that!

Take a look in the mirror and sing a few lines of a song – most likely, you'll be amazed at how little you move or change expressions. Now practice “re-stating” while you sing those lines. Watch how much more interesting, sincere and exciting you appear! How you express yourself is a treasure – make sure you bring it to chorus!

## **Week #4 -Watch Your Director – All the Time!**

We all need to focus our eyes and attention on the director at all times! The only time we should ever have our eyes elsewhere is when we have a planned move during the song when we are supposed to look elsewhere. This is true in performance and rehearsal! Our choreographer is very specific about these spots. When in doubt, watch the director. This also means your head is turned toward the director – not just your eyes.

It is especially good practice to NOT look at any other member or guest who comes in late or is doing something different from the chorus. It's extremely distracting for whoever is “up front” and you'll miss something!

This seems like an easy one, but it does require your focus and concentration at times. Remember to “check-in” with yourself as often as possible to see how you're doing. Feel free to call, e-mail or catch me at rehearsal if I can be of any help.

## **Week #5 - Open Mouth on the Pitch**

This is something that makes such a big difference in our sound! It means that when you hear the pitch blow, you should open your mouth to the shape of the first vowel sound that will come out when you begin singing. You're mouth isn't over-extended or huge, just open!

While the pitch is being blown and you're waiting for that signal to begin, you're breathing through your mouth and nose preparing to make that first sound. You may notice that sometimes the director waits to begin the song in rehearsal while she scans the chorus to make sure everyone has their mouth open. We're trying to create that habit in every member – and you'll be ahead of the game (sometimes changing old habits is tough!). Rookies are usually among the best in doing this – so keep up the good work!

## **Week #6 - Down the Tiles, or “DT”**

This means to turn your body and face directly out to the audience (not in the curve of the risers), straight out to the audience from your place on the risers. Turn your body until it is parallel to the edge of the stage. The term is sometimes used by choruses to tell members to line up with the tiles in their rehearsal room floor (hence the name). Normally, this only happens at the end of a song, accepting applause or in specific choreographic moments. Do this placement only when the choreographer instructs you to do it. The normal chorus position is in the curve of the risers, turned toward the director. It doesn't happen often, but when it does, it's extremely effective! “DT” is your time to reach out to the audience directly and soak up their energy and applause – enjoy!

## **Week #7 - Don't Watch the Front Row!**

The Front Row often has different or expanded choreography moves than the rest of the chorus. They're supposed to look out into the audience more often than the riser members. If you fall into the habit of watching the front row to cue you on your choreography, you may find yourself moving when your riser buddies are not! You'll find yourself much more comfortable with the choreography if you will practice just a little at home – especially right after rehearsal. That assurance will give you the confidence to perform with freedom and ease – able to focus on vocal production and delivering the message of the song. Now THAT'S a beautiful thing!

## **Week #8 - It's Never Too Late!**

It's never too late to make an improvement in yourself! If you realize that you're tense or your face isn't “on” or you're not singing with energy or dynamics or anything else – you can correct it right then! It won't look funny – the more you catch yourself and correct something, the easier it is to make it a habit.

\*\*One exception – if you're late on a choreography move, DON'T DO IT! (more on that next week...)

## **Week #9 - Missed Choreography Moves**

Remember last time when we said “it's never too late”? Well, there is one tiny exception – if you miss a choreography move, just miss it! Don't begin it late and DON'T let that little slip up show on your face or in any subsequent move. Everyone messes up! Just let it go and move on to the next move. If you're face remains “in the game”, probably no one will ever know.

From the Judging Category Description Book, “One of the major concerns of the average chorus member is forgetting planned movements. Those fears are usually groundless because the showmanship judge (and the audience) cannot possibly watch each individual during all motions just in case one member misses. On the other hand, early or late movements do attract the attention because they create a flaw in the unit presentation.”

Relax and enjoy the performance – it may not be completely flawless, but it will be engaging and enjoyable if we all stay in character. Have fun!

## **Week #10 - Sneak Breathing**

Although this topic will be covered in your rookie classes for vocal reasons, it has some visual aspects as well. If you have to sneak a breath (and all of us do!), make it seamless! Not only does that mean that it will need to be noiseless when you breathe, but your mouth will need to still be forming the words as though you were still singing. Your facial expression will need to remain involved as well. No one will ever be able to tell by looking at you that you've just taken a breath. Whew!

## **Week #11 - Hang 10**

Hanging 10 means to be sure that you're standing at the very front of your riser step. It serves two purposes: 1) it keeps us from crowding the people behind us, and 2) it helps to keep our energy level up through our performance rather than "settling back" which immediately pulls down the energy level.

As you face the director, your outside foot should be so close to the front edge of the riser that your toes are actually hanging over the edge at bit! Your inside foot will be nearly as close, but not actually hanging over, for stability. (Okay, so that's actually only hanging 5, but who's counting!) You'll find you have more energy in your attitude and performance just by standing this way.

Now you may notice as you begin using the "Hang 10" position that some of the more "experienced" members in front of you may not be doing the same! This will make you feel crowded and your tendency will be to step back. Stand firm, my friend!! Eventually they'll catch on when they feel crowded as well. We all know better, but sometimes forget. So be on the leading edge (so to speak) of this – others will follow!

## **Week #11 - Energy**

You will hear this term applied to nearly everything we do! This excerpt from the Judging Category Description book aptly explains why: "energy is the force that propels all aspects of musical performance. It adds a special shine to the visual performance, taking it beyond routine into magic. Energy is the life force of the showmanship category. Adding energy for a performance well-grounded in basic musical techniques will be recognized and rewarded by the showmanship judge (and the audience)."

One comment we often hear at our performances is that "you look like you're having so much fun up there!" That's energy! We don't just sing – we perform and entertain! We express the joy of music in our faces, bodies and attitudes. Energy is what gives our music life and joy!

Are you showing energy? Revealing your love for this wonderful music? How are you showing it? If you have any questions or wonder if you're using energy, just ask one of us on the choreography team. We'd be glad to watch, offer tips and see you shine!

## **Week #12 - Facial Expression**

Sometimes we struggle with what our faces should look like as we sing. Sweet Adelines are known for giving visual expression as part of our performances because we always look like we're enjoying ourselves...even on a serious song. First and most important are your eyes. You'll want to let them sparkle and shine with the joy and intensity you feel, always looking interested and involved. One trick to get this effect is to think of having a really good secret that you're trying to keep inside. Try it for a minute and see how you feel. Now go look in the mirror to see what it looks like. You'll probably see that your eyes sparkle and your cheeks are lifted. Your mouth isn't necessarily open in a big smile...after all, it's a secret! That's exactly the effect you want! Remember how it feels and begin practicing it at every opportunity when you sing. Another technique is to try talking like you're singing to a five year old – it's amazing how animated we get when we're talking to children! It takes that much energy and facial involvement to reach into the audience.

The expression comes entirely from the eyes...and you may be surprised how happy you look without a huge smile! A big smile is beautiful (please use it between songs!), but if it is too extreme, it will cause vocal tension and may not appear sincere. Smiles aren't always necessary to convey emotion – the eyes are the windows of the soul!

Even when we're singing a sad song, we never want to look totally sad. That automatically drags down our facial muscles, taking our vocal production down the tubes as well! We may appear pensive or thoughtful, but always we want to convey energy and involvement in the message. It takes practice to perform ballads or sad songs effectively, but be assured that energy and expression in the eyes are the key!

“Facial expression is the best tool available to the performer in visual communication with the audience. The stage performer realizes that more intensity and animation are required in a stage performance than in a face-to-face interaction, because of the distance that must be spanned. The performer’s job is to communicate with the last row of the audience, not just the judging panel.” *JCDB*

So that’s your challenge for this week! Take a minute and practice what it feels like to sing this way in front of a mirror. As always, if you have questions, just let me know!

### **Week #13 -“Outside” and “Inside”**

You’ll hear these terms applied to all kinds of things at rehearsal. Basically, when you’re standing on the risers facing the director, your outside hand is the one closest to the edge of the stage. For instance, if you are on the right side of the chorus, your “outside” hand is your right hand (or foot, shoulder, etc) or the one closest to the edge of the stage. Your “inside” is the hand (or whatever) closest to the center of the risers. If you are on the left hand side of the chorus facing the director, your left is the outside and your right is the inside.

Nothing too challenging about this one – just a definition to become familiar with so that when they tell you to use your inside hand or foot, you’ll know which one that is!

### **Week #14 - Consider Every Rehearsal a Performance**

It’s so easy to get flustered on stage! The only way around that is to act like each rehearsal is a performance. Put your face and energy into every song we do – that’s the only way things will become a habit. Then on stage we can concentrate on our finest singing and entertaining because everything else will be natural to us! You won’t look silly to anyone – really!! We love that about you! Seriously, the director really appreciates looking at faces that are reflecting joy and energy back to her – it gives her energy to pass along to us.

Make each performance and contest appearance a fun and enjoyable experience by being completely prepared because you were performing at every rehearsal!!

### **Week #15 - Practice, Practice, Practice!**

Taking a few minutes at home each week to practice in the mirror will be SO valuable to you! Whether you’re practicing your choreography or your facial expression or even just seeing what you look like when you sing and dance, it will give you a chance to experiment without feeling like everyone is looking at you. It will give you so much more confidence and security! Most importantly, it will give you a chance to see what other people see...and if you don’t like it, you can change it!

It’s also very important to practice your choreography both at home and by attending extra help choreography sessions whenever possible. This allows you to concentrate on the vocal portion of rehearsal instead of worrying about your moves. Practice makes permanent!