

## The M-nax Dirty Dozen Rules for Choral Singing

1. **Breathe in the Space that you are going to sing.** As you inhale, think about the first vowel sound you will make as you begin the phrase. The shape of your mouth should match that vowel shape during the inhalation phase.
2. **Beautiful Singing is Not an Accident.** Before any sound ever comes out of your mouth, it should first be conceived in your mind. The voice is like a child - if you don't tell it what to do, it will do whatever the heck it wants to. The vowel shape, the amount of air required, the meaning of the text, the contour of the phrase, etc... all of it is predestined by you. Hear what you want to produce in your head first before it ever comes pouring out of your mouth.
3. **Don't Close the Valve!** Your air flow must begin before the vocal folds can begin vibration. If we don't suspend the air, then the first sound that we make is NOT "riding on a cushion" of air. Blowing the vocal cords apart (or glottal attack) often results in a "crack" or "pop" kind of sound as we begin the phrase and it is more often than not, out of tune as well.
4. **Beautiful tone lies in the vowel.** Round vowels make singing so much easier. Make sure the soft palate remains high and lifted. Also, remember that "nasal" vowels do not exist in English. Vowels followed by "n", "m" or "ng" can become nasal if you are not careful. Remember to mentally substitute alternate consonants at the end of the word to keep the palate high. Diphthongs - first sound is long, second is short.
5. **If You Don't Feel it, I Don't Hear It!** If vowels are the beauty, then consonants are the drama! The amount of energy behind your consonants determines whether or not the audience will understand the text. Some consonants like "s", "sh", and "z" will be easily heard and therefore, need little air pressure behind them. However, sounds like "k", "g", "p", "t", "v" and "f" are difficult to hear and require more pressure. If you think, "Man, I just made a GREAT "t" sound", then we probably heard it.
6. **Don't be the Heavy!** Singers generally sing with too much weight in the voice. Lighten up and use less voice on unaccented syllables and words. The text and articulation markings are your best guide in determining when you should alter weight in the voice. Women, especially when you are moving into the upper vocal register, thin and lighten until after you have successfully maneuvered through the passagio. (register shift) Men, you should begin to add a little weight as you approach the passagio.
7. **Sing Through It - NOT To It!** Singers often have a tendency to "hang out" on long notes until it is time to move to the next note or to take a breath. By feeding air to every portion of the beat, long notes will remain energized and vibrant! - NO LOITERING.
8. **Repeated Notes - Separate.** Singers should articulate repeated notes by putting a bit of space or at least, back off the pressure moving into the repeated note. This provides forward momentum and sense of urgency throughout the phrase.
9. **The Dot.** A dotted note can be more effective if sung one of 2 ways. #1-Re energize the beat on which the dot resides thus maintaining a vibrant tone through the end of the note. Or #2- Back off the air pressure on the dot and use it as a springboard to propel and emphasize the following note. The text will often help you to determine which option is best.
10. **Get "SAS"sy.** Generally, as pitch ascends we need to add a) *more Support*, b) *more Air*, and c) *more Space (inside the mouth)*. Remember to LIFT into the high notes, don't PUSH. Women should modify to a more OPEN vowel. Men should modify toward a more CLOSED vowel.
11. **Never Louder Than Lovely.** When increasing dynamic levels, we all have a point in our voice when the sound we produce ceases to be beautiful and therefore, unpleasant to listen to (and often unpleasant to sing.) I have referred to this as - "Singing over the ugly line" OR "Singing outside the beauty box". It all means the same thing. If you are unsure where that is in your voice, ask your neighbor, I am SURE they will be happy to let you know.
12. **Singing is a Physical Activity.** In order to become an excellent singer, you must remain physically involved in your singing. Freedom of sound comes from an absence of rigidity. Literally speaking, you should be working your tail off from the waist down, but the waist up, singing should look and feel very buoyant and free. Remember, your entire body IS your instrument, not just the case in which it resides.