

CHORAL & CLARITY



**The 4 steps to building a
successful choral program**

by Adam Paltrowitz

Congratulations for getting started on your journey!

At Choral Clarity, we have all the resources you need to build a flourishing choral program!

There are 4 steps to building a successful choral program.

In the pages that follow, you will get an overview of the four steps. Next, we will take a deep dive into those 4 steps.

I have a passion for standing with choir directors to create outstanding programs that are a joy for students and for teachers to teach.

I'm guessing you are reading this document because that is what you are looking for: a choir program that is dynamic and a lot of fun to lead!

I want to stand with you as you create something extraordinary.

And the good news is that you can achieve your goals faster than you think!

CHORAL CLARITY

The 4 steps to building a successful choral program

by Adam Paltrowitz

Step 1

Create a positive, structured learning environment that allows for focused rehearsals and engaged singers.

Step 2

Ensure every singer is capable of matching pitch, holding their part, and singing confidently.

Step 3

Develop musical literacy skills in all individual singers, collectively leading to a more enriching choral experience.

Step 4

Cultivate a tradition of choral excellence, led by highly motivated student leaders and empowered singers.

Step 1

Create a positive, structured learning environment that allows for focused rehearsals and engaged singers.

A successful learning environment must be both structured and positive. If it is structured but students operate out of fear, they will not collectively reach their fullest potential. If an environment is positive but without structure, students will lack the focus to collectively achieve.

A positive and structured learning environment comes from having:

- 1. Clear and positively-framed guidelines**
- 2. An effective approach toward training students to follow the guidelines**
- 3. Useful routines and procedures for everything that occurs during a rehearsal**
- 4. A well-structured rehearsal**
- 5. Engaged students who are actively learning**

Step 2

Ensure every singer is capable of matching pitch, holding their part, and singing confidently.

There are two ways to approach this step:

- 1) Remove all the students who cannot match pitch*
- 2) Develop a system to teach every singer to match pitch

*I believe many choral directors take the easy way out by using the select & neglect approach: select the students who sing well and neglect the ones who can't.

Yes, you can build a successful program if you weed out all of the struggling singers, but this approach cuts out so many singers who have the potential to contribute musically and beyond. Additionally, this approach limits the passion of many potential life-long musicians and more importantly, potential life-long patrons of the arts.

I recommend giving every student who enters your room the opportunity to become a life-long singer. In order for this to happen, they must first be able to match pitch.

Matching pitch is not an all-or-nothing skill. I utilize a 7-step process to get any struggling singer to match pitch. These tangible steps are measurable through my pitch-matching rubric.

The rubric consists of 5 levels of development; each level has several independent skills that must be accomplished before moving to the next level. The way to improve these independent skills is by continually using my 7-step process alongside the rubric.

Step 3

Develop musical literacy skills in all individual singers, collectively leading to a more enriching choral experience.

It is my belief that we must first place the focus on the development of each individual singer before setting expectations on the ensemble.

Music literacy skills are broken down into the following areas of study:

- Vocal technique
- Aural Training - Tonal Literacy
- Academic Music Literacy
- Sight-Singing (the combination of Tonal & Academic Music Literacy)
- Terminology

Vocal technique is often misunderstood by choral directors. Many choral directors confuse choral technique with vocal technique.

We may be the only “voice teacher” our students ever have. As a result, we should be teaching techniques that improve their individual voice. Some general areas of development include: proper body alignment, breath control, tonal placement, vowel formation, diction, and tension-free singing.

Aural Training

This begins with the ability to consistently match pitch, but it progresses into being able to sing any diatonic interval instantly.

There are steps to getting there:

1. Matching pitch
2. Singing a scale in tune
3. The ability to alternate between step-wise pitches and a broken triad - the beginning of audiation (step-wise vs skipping)
4. Breaking apart the scale and singing random diatonic pitches in any order

These four skills are also necessary before a singer can successfully sight-sing or hold their choral part. I've developed rubrics for each of these 4 skills where each skill has 5 clear levels of development.

Academic Music Literacy

This aspect of literacy involves everything that a non-musician can learn and process. For example, someone who has never heard music before can learn to read the notes of a musical staff (for example: *Every Good Boy Does Fine and FACE in the space*).

Non-musical literacy is a way to define what has already been developed by the ear. Without the ear and development of musical literacy, these skills lack purpose.

Sight-singing

Sight-singing is the combination of three independent skills:

- 1) The development of the ear (this consists of the 4 skills listed in ear-training)
- 2) The ability to decode the pitches on the staff at an appropriate speed (non-tonal literacy)
- 3) The ability to decode and perform rhythm (non-tonal literacy)

When any one of those three skills are under-developed, a student will likely struggle to sight-sing. Just as there are 5 levels of development for each of the 4 ear-training steps, I've created a 5 level rubric for note-labeling and rhythm labeling/performing.

Musical Terminology

While sight-singing is part of music literacy, there are additional aspects of literacy that need to be learned. Some examples of additional music literacy are:

- 1) Fundamental music terminology related to music-making. Some examples of basic terminology are: measure, pick-up, articulations, dynamics
- 2) Properly Marking music (marking breaths, modifying notes to account for breaths, acknowledging changes in tempos, dynamics, etc.

Step 4

Cultivate a tradition of choral excellence, led by highly motivated student leaders and empowered singers.

Once students are in a structured and positive learning environment where they all can successfully lend their voice and produce high-level music, it is now time to instill a sense of tradition. Tradition comes from:

1. Having a clear philosophy that all decisions are based upon
2. Students continuing year after year (retention)
3. Students taking ownership of their ensemble
4. Current students recruiting new students
5. Current students teaching new students the ways of the ensemble
6. Students stepping up to do more than expected
7. Student leaders truly leading by example
8. Alumni returning, year after year

Now that you know the 4 steps,

How do you get started on your journey?

I'm glad you asked! I suggest starting from the ground up: Step 1.

[My Choir Crash Course is the place to begin!](#)

This online, on demand course will ensure you have created a safe, positive, and well-structured learning environment for your students. This course works MID-YEAR, so you can begin building your foundation NOW!

When you complete this course, you will have:

- Effective guidelines for your choral rehearsals
- An effective means to reinforce those guidelines without fear and punishment
- Proper procedures and routines in place to minimize disruptions
- An effective strategy for establishing a seating plan
- A completed handbook that lists all important class information
- An effective way to structure your rehearsals
- The tools to teach your singers to self-assess their participation
- Strategies for engaging your class through asking and answering questions

If there are any holes in your foundation, some aspects of your choir will slip through the cracks.

The Choir Crash Course is intended to build a solid foundation. The course focuses more on the WHY than the WHAT. The goal is to learn how to think through the process of building a program and to consistently make effective decisions.

The image is a promotional graphic for a course. It features a blue rectangular box with white and pink text overlaid on a photograph of a choir. The text in the box reads: "Choir Crash Course:" in large white letters, followed by "Adam Paltrowitz, instructor" in smaller white letters. Below that, "MID-YEAR RETOOL" is written in large pink letters. At the bottom of the box, it says "YOU CAN REGAIN THEIR FOCUS AND RESPECT NOW!" in pink. At the very bottom of the image, there is a white rectangular box with the logo "CHORAL & CLARITY" in black and blue text. The background photo shows several young people in a choir setting, some looking towards the camera and others looking slightly away.

Choir Crash Course:
Adam Paltrowitz, instructor
MID-YEAR RETOOL
YOU CAN REGAIN THEIR FOCUS AND RESPECT NOW!

CHORAL & CLARITY