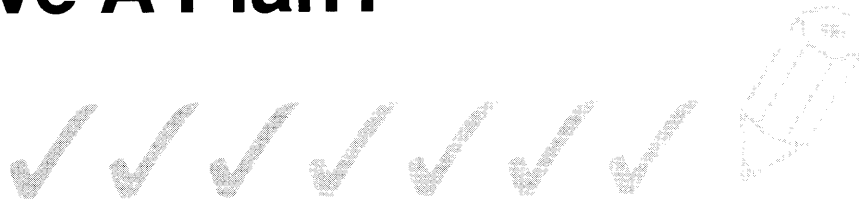


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# Do I Play My Rehearsals By Ear? Or Do I Have A Plan?

by Emily Croom



**W**hen, in that moment of inexplicable enthusiasm, we agree to direct a children's choir for the first time, we often have no idea what lies ahead. More often than not, when we look back on one, or many years of working with children's choirs, we are amazed at how much we have grown, especially musically and spiritually. We hope that somehow in the process we have touched young lives in a positive way and that some of the wisdom and knowledge we have imparted to our singers will stick.

In order to gain such a positive experience ourselves and to create a positive experience for those we lead, we strive to grow continually. Summer and weekend workshops are beneficial, and we gain priceless help from the LETTERS each month. We talk with more experienced directors and receive input from parents. But new ideas are worthless unless we work them, week after week, until we mold them into first class training for our own groups of singers.

Growth requires observing, adjusting, and re-thinking. Growth may require more precise written plans and more preparation time. Growth may suggest new body language, revitalized voice and verbal habits, or a fresh rehearsal style.

Sometimes, directors do what they do, the way they do it, because no one has proposed a more effective way. The checklist below can be just what is needed in planning and evaluating rehearsals. Streamlining rehearsals and reminding ourselves of our long-range goals help solve and avoid a variety of uncomfortable situations, such as discipline problems or arriving at a performance date with an unprepared choir. Obviously, the age and focus of the choir determine the specific content of any rehearsal, but these same questions can be effectively used for preschool, primary, junior, or junior high choir rehearsals.

## Rehearsal Evaluation or Planning Guide For Children's Choir Directors

1. Did I arrive early enough to have all materials ready when the first child arrived? Did I come with lesson plan already prepared? Did I provide the accompanist with materials and order of rehearsal before rehearsal began?
2. Did I begin promptly and dismiss on time?
3. Did we sing at least 30-45 minutes of the rehearsal? (assuming 1-hour rehearsal) Was the remainder of the time spent in purposeful activities related to our music, to rhythm, to worship, or to an upcoming program?
4. Did my lesson plan and the rehearsal include:
  - a. a hymn (refrain and/or stanza, new or familiar, teaching or reviewing)?
  - b. 2-4 fun songs (warm-up, breaks in rehearsal, change of pace, body rhythm)?
  - c. 3-5 worship songs, anthems, scripture songs (including program and festival music)?
  - d. at least 1 echo activity for rhythm and/or pitch, more than 1 for preschool and primary children? (Can be included in a-c above.)
  - e. a song using body rhythms (clap, snap, pat, stamp, etc); more than 1 for preschool and primary children? (Can be included in a-c above.)
  - f. lots of short activities for preschool and primary choirs?
  - g. enough activities to keep rehearsal pace moving rather fast? Did the rehearsal keep the children busy, interested, and involved in purposeful, sometimes challenging, activities?
5. Was there a good balance between singing *a cappella* and singing with keyboard?
6. Did I let the children sing alone (without me) so that I could listen? How much? What did I learn from listening?

7. Did I introduce or review at least one of these:
  - a. Bible verse (as in scripture song, anthem, or story)?
  - b. Christian symbol (from Sanctuary, season, anthem, etc)?
  - c. Christian concept, belief, season (not too abstract)?
  - d. Any part of worship service or worship vocabulary?
8. Which music vocabulary, symbols, and concepts did I introduce or review?
9. Did I have the choir stand to sing? How much? Did I include movement activities, especially for primary and preschool children?
10. Did I compliment the choir? Did I critique in a positive way? Did I give the choir a chance to critique its own singing? Did the children feel successful?
11. What was the highlight of rehearsal? for me? for the children?
12. Were the children receptive, attentive, inquisitive, responsive, cooperative? If not, how can I change my rehearsal structure or methods?
13. Was I enthusiastic, positive, relaxed, well-prepared? How was my sense of humor? Did I resort to shouting, whining, begging? If so, how can I restructure rehearsal or methods to make that response unnecessary?
14. What do I want to do differently next week? Did anything not work as I had hoped? Why? What worked best? What worked well?
15. Did I have a parent to help check in late-arrivals and assist in other ways so that I could concentrate on rehearsing with the whole group? Did the parent volunteer(s) check roll, record excused absences, and make provision for contacting absentees, including sending to them any notes handed out at rehearsal?
16. If we sent notes home, did I tell the children the main points in the notes?
17. In my planning, am I allowing at least 6 - 8 weeks of rehearsals on an anthem or other piece of music before a public presentation, including a worship service?

At the very least, answering these questions will eliminate dead or ineffective moments in practice. At best, they will provide direction and focus in the rehearsal time. Consistently used, they can provide a measure of your work as you strive to meet the musical and spiritual challenges of a children's choir.