

# Strategies for Sight-Singing

## CHAPTER 22

For many students the prospect of having to sing two melodies on the AP exam can be a frightening and traumatic experience. It doesn't have to be. In order to be truly confident, or at least reasonably comfortable, you have to do one thing—practice singing. The students who do not do well on the exam are those who gave up in the beginning. Remember, it is not about being perfect, although many will sing the examples flawlessly. It is about demonstrating what you *can* do to the best of your ability. That means staying calm and focused and singing as much of the exercise as correctly as you can, recovering if you falter. Many students feel a certain amount of anxiety because it is as close to “performing” as there is on the exam. If that is the case, take steps to eliminate anxiety just like you would if you were about to sing a solo on stage: Take deep breaths, have centered and focused thought, and *prepare* ahead of time.

### FIVE TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL SIGHT-SINGING

#### TIP

1

#### Sing!

Sing every day. Sing for five minutes a day while you're fixing your hair or driving to school. Establish a routine. Sing the scale degree finder in major and then repeat it in minor. Sing a major scale and intervals, plus the scale in thirds. Sing it in the parallel minor. Sing the tendency tone patterns:

*Do-Mi-So-Mi-Do//Fa-Mi//La-So//Ti-Do//Re-Do//So-Do*

Combine the Top Ten Melodic Patterns into these three exercises. Sing in major and minor.

1. *Do-Re-Mi-Fi-So-Fa-Mi-Re-Do-Mi-So-Mi-Do-↓So-La-Ti-Do*
2. *↓So-Do-Mi-Re-Fa-Mi-So-Fa-La-So-Mi-Fa-Re-Mi-Do-Re-Ti-Do*  
(↓So to Do is an anacrusis)
3. *Do-Ti-Do-Mi-So-So-Do Do-Re-Mi-Do-Fa-So-Do*

I V<sup>6</sup> I I<sup>6</sup> I<sub>4</sub> V I I V<sub>4</sub> I<sup>6</sup> I ii<sup>6</sup> V I

Now you're connecting the dots!

(This is a bass line.  
What chords are implied?)

## TIP

2

**Have a strategy.**

Plan to sing with syllables, numbers, or just on *La*. Don't sing nonsense, don't sing "tut" (too much "T" sound), but do sing with the same system each and every time a new melody is sung. Do not whistle and do not hum. Practice a "Plan B"—attempt the solfege and if you get flustered, then drop the syllables and go with *Dab* or *Lah* or even *Noo* (New). Solfege can be a valuable tool to help determine interval and pitch; however, some students feel that if they are not completely comfortable, it almost seems like singing in a foreign language where using the right "words" outweigh the desired goal—correct pitch and rhythm.

## TIP

3

**Perform with a steady tempo and a slower tempo.**

Do not start and stop when you sing. You get one point for *not hesitating*. It is called the "flow point." The flow of the melody is an important part of the evaluation, so your performance needs to be consistent and steady. You don't get points for singing fast, or with vibrato or great tone quality. If you sing very slowly, make sure you are prepared for holding out long notes the appropriate length.

## TIP

4

**Be rhythmically accurate.**

Make sure you give full durational value to the rhythms you sing, particularly with the last note of the melody. Students often sing a perfect melody and then lose one full point because the last note is not held to full duration. This is most common in compound meter when the last note is usually a dotted quarter note.

## TIP

5

**Know your own range and the range of the example.**

This is so important. The exam will present the first note of the example that is to be sung (usually *Do*). You do *not* have to sing it in that key. However, you must maintain the key (and tempo) you establish with your first two notes. One of the examples will be in bass clef. Women are not expected to sing the example in bass clef, but in their own range. If you have a comfortable range of one octave look at the example and see how far below and above *Do* it is written. Rarely will both examples start on low *Do* ( $\hat{1}$ ) and extend to high *Do* ( $\hat{8}$ ). What is common is for the example to start on  $\hat{1}$ , move below *Do* to *So*, and then move above *Do* also to *So* or to *La*, usually ending on the original *Do*. You may indeed have to sing an octave, but the octave may be between low *So* and high *So* and not from *Do* to *Do*. Therefore, if you begin the example singing on the lowest note of your range you have nowhere to go. **Determine what note is the center of the example and make that note the center of your range.**

## OTHER HINTS

Here are some more helpful tips:

1. Practice the melody *out loud*. Start singing from the second your time begins. Sing while you circle or write, or simply start singing at the beginning and work through to the end. Sing strong and confidently. Don't be afraid of your own voice.
2. Check the clef. One example will be in bass and one will be in treble.
3. Check the key signature and determine the key you are to sing in. This information is *not* given. You must make that identification and begin practicing immediately. One example will be in major and one will be in minor.
4. Determine the meter, establish your beat and tempo, look for tricky rhythms, and tap out the rhythm. One will be in simple meter and one will be in compound.
5. Sing the scale associated with the example (major or minor) and the tonic triad including low *So*:  $\hat{1}-\hat{3}-\hat{5}-\hat{3}-\hat{1}-\downarrow\hat{5}-\hat{1}$ .
6. **Look for the patterns.** There will be many familiar patterns and very often *Do-Mi-So* or *Do-Re-Mi* at the beginning.
7. With a pencil, (yes, pencils are allowed in sight-singing) circle all the *Dos* and also mark any "tricky" solfege. You do *not* need to pencil in every single solfege syllable—it takes way too long and you have only 75 seconds. Remember, while you are marking you should be singing.
8. Look for the tricky melodic patterns, perhaps a *Fa-Fi-So*, an awkward leap, or a tricky rhythm. Isolate that tricky place and practice that. Sometimes you can "find" a pitch by working up the scale or down the scale or by using the Scale Degree Finder.
9. Work out any places that fell apart or that were incorrect.
10. Perform the melody again correctly before the practice time is over.

### TIP

#### 6

#### Understand about scoring.

Scoring the sight-singing portion of the exam is done in half-measure segments. In  $\frac{1}{4}$  time that is the equivalent of two quarter notes and in  $\frac{3}{8}$  time it is the equivalent of three eighth notes. For every half-measure segment that is correct in pitch and rhythm, one point is awarded; plus one point is awarded for *not hesitating*—the "flow point." The high score is 9 points. Alternate scoring is also possible through grading of pitch only (high score is 4 points) or pitch only (high score is 2 points).

As you are preparing for the sight-singing portion of the exam:

- Practice the way you will do it on the exam.
- Limit your practice time to 75 seconds.
- After 75 seconds, sing the example straight through **once** with no stops.
- Record your performance if possible.
- After performing, review your mistakes and determine whether it was the correct melody by playing it on the piano or another instrument.
- Ask your teacher to help with the scoring for a more accurate assessment of your skill.

## Melodies for Sight-Singing Practice

These examples are comparable to sight-singing Questions 1 and 2.

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9. Now try the same melody in the relative minor with a “twist.” Note that A $\flat$  Major in bass clef and F minor in treble clef look exactly the same on the staff.



10. Notice the three-note melodic sequence in the first three beats: each time the motif is up a m3 and the note below is a half step. The second phrase includes a natural minor descending pattern.



11. This example contains *Di*—raised scale degree  $\hat{1}$ . Harmonically it would be V/ii. The E natural is the leading tone of F (Major or minor).



12.



13.



14.



15.



La-Si-La is V/vi; F# is the leading tone in the relative key of G minor.

16.



17.



18.



19. Be careful.



20.



21.

Moderato



22.

Moderato



23.

Moderato



24.

Moderato

