

COMPOSERS' GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE REHEARSALS

Prepared by David Vayo

- Start recruiting musicians well in advance of the concert date; I suggest one month minimum. Give the music to them as soon as possible after they commit (indeed, many of them may want to see the music in order to make their decision.) Note: if you're working with a conductor, check to find out whether the conductor would prefer to recruit the performers.
- The larger the ensemble, the more important it is to schedule rehearsals well in advance (I recommend at least three weeks' in advance of the first rehearsal for large ensembles.) Exception: if your piece is for from one to three players, it's possible to schedule with much less lead time. If your piece is for a small to medium-sized ensemble, collect everyone's schedules to find the best times to rehearse. The larger the ensemble size, the more you should expect that not everyone's schedules will permit them to attend every rehearsal. Indeed, for ensembles larger than about 12 people it's best to set the times in advance *without* consulting individual schedules; use your best judgment as to when people are less likely to be busy. If a musician tells you that they'll only be able to get to half of the rehearsals, find another. This is much more efficient than trying to coordinate a huge number of schedules.
- Schedule at least one more rehearsal that you think you'll need, to be safe. You can always cancel a rehearsal later.
- Send out a reminder message to performers shortly before each rehearsal.
- If a piece is falling together more quickly than you had anticipated, cancel one or two rehearsals (but not the last one before the performance). It's important not to peak too early.
- Proofread the score and parts carefully before distributing them to the players and (if applicable) the conductor.
- Study the score thoroughly before the first rehearsal; just because you wrote it doesn't mean you'll remember all of the details.
- If a conductor is involved, meet with her or him in advance of the first rehearsal to go over the piece, answer their questions, and find out what their preferred method is of getting input from the composer during rehearsals. Is it OK for the composer to offer suggestions at any time, or would the conductor prefer to periodically ask the composer for feedback?
- For medium- and large-sized ensemble rehearsals, set the room up (chairs, stands etc.) before the rehearsal begins.
- Have the score with you at all rehearsals. Take notes as you listen.
- When giving suggestions at rehearsals, be as concise and efficient as possible. Avoid taking up more valuable rehearsal time than absolutely necessary. If you have a long list of comments,

choose the most critical ones. The others (if important enough) can be dealt with via email, meeting separately with individual musicians, etc. Your tone when giving comments should be courteous, clear and firm. Musicians respect a composer who knows what he/she wants and who respects their abilities and their time.