

L.A.W. (Learn Arm Waving) School 101
Great Lakes Harmony Region 17
Summer Camp June 2024
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A Hands-On Primer of Conducting Basics

Today's Goal:

To provide participants with the knowledge and tools which, through practice, will enable them to direct an ensemble in a performance

Today's Content:

The demonstration of

- Posture and Body Positions
- Arm and Hand Positions and Movements
- Facial Posture, Eye Contact and Expressions
- Ictus and Common Beat Patterns
- The use of the ictus to clearly communicate downbeats, upbeats and backbeats
- Breaths, Preparatory Beats and Cut Offs

Iconic choral conductor **Rodney Eichenberger** once said of conducting, "What THEY see is what YOU get!" Kudos for developing your talents, for understanding how essential your role is. How essential YOU are in allowing our singers to JUST SING, to connect to our singers from the heart, and allow the music to happen!

Conducting Basics

Posture and Body Positions

- All of the elements of correct singing posture; lifted, energized but free of tension
- Use constant but appropriate movement without bending or bouncing

Arm and Hand Positions and Movements

- Keep arms within core “power box” except in special circumstances
- Movement through beats should be smooth and feel like moving arm through water
- Wrist should remain firm and straight as if dribbling a basketball while balancing a coin
- Use the dominant hand for tempo/rhythm, movement of sound. Use the other hand for dynamics, embellishments, carry-overs, swipes, etc. The other hand is the “extra” hand. When not using it, keep it relaxed and at your side or in front of your body.

Facial Posture, Eye Contact and Expressions

- Conduct with the face of a singer. Maintain constant and continuous eye contact, speaking to every singer in every song.
- Avoid mouthing the lyrics as a habit. This robs the conductor of using this as a tool when needed in places to clean up synch or give vocal cues
- Use the face to express the music. The mood and the meaning of music should be ever present on the conductor's face, and the singers will reflect what they see.
- Maintain congruence of facial expression, mouth signals and hand signals.

Ictus and Common Beat Patterns

- The ictus is the invisible horizontal plane where the conductor begins the preparatory gesture and where the primary beat (downbeat) lands. It is usually level with the elbow and between the sternum and waist. Your hands should tap the imaginary plane and bounce off, much like bouncing a ball.
- The **beat patterns** are the foundation of all conducting and should be mastered so that a conductor can meld the patterns into a personal, more interpretive and musical style. While using patterns seems to lack musicality, conducting beats helps people sing TOGETHER, and is much more musical than conducting words, which is the trap most new directors fall into.

The most common **beat patterns** are the **2-beat patterns (2/2, 2/4)**, the **3-beat pattern (3/4)**, and the 4-beat pattern (4/4 or C). Patterns help establishing tempo, but are typically not maintained in barbershop and other choral conducting. More common is to conduct only the downbeat in 3/4 tempo, one beat (downbeat) or 2 beats (beats 1 and 3) in 4/4 and one beat to the measure in 2/2 (cut time). Always remember, what it comes to conducting, LESS IS MORE.



“Lynne’s Default Figure Eight Pattern”

LET'S CONDUCT PATTERNS!

DOWNBEAT – 1 PATTERN

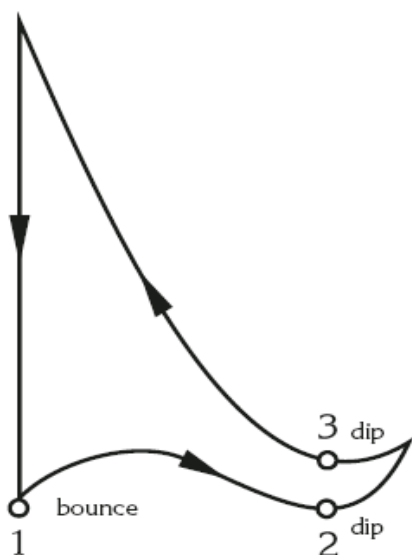


TWO BEAT PATTERN

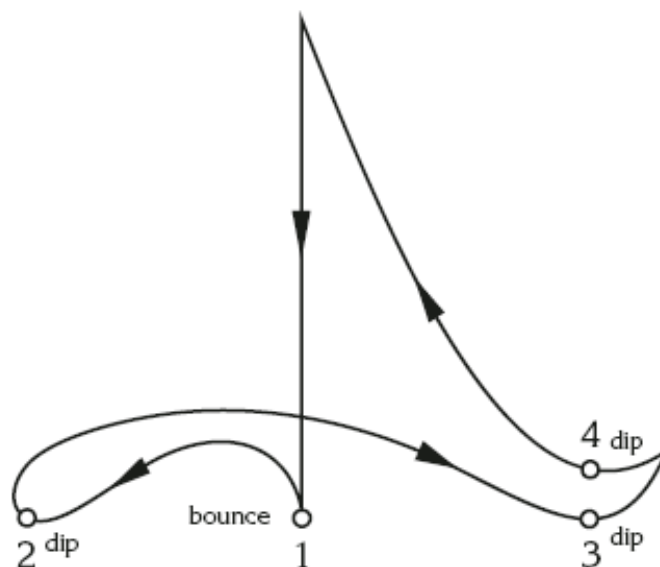


Each **beat pattern** begins with a strong downward arm motion. The DOWNBEAT occurs on the first beat of every measure regardless of the time signature. The TWO BEAT PATTERN moves slightly to the right or left and up following the downbeat. It is similar to making a “comma” with the arm and hand. These diagrams do not show the preparatory beats.

THREE BEAT PATTERN



FOUR BEAT PATTERN



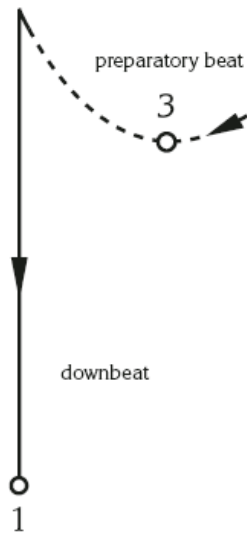
The **THREE BEAT pattern** moves to the outside right following the downbeat, then up. The **FOUR BEAT pattern** sweeps to the outside left across the body following the downbeat, taps the ictus plane, then sweeps to the outside right tapping the ictus plane, then up. These diagrams do not show the preparatory beats.

LET'S CONDUCT PREPARATORY BEATS, BREATHS AND CUT OFFS

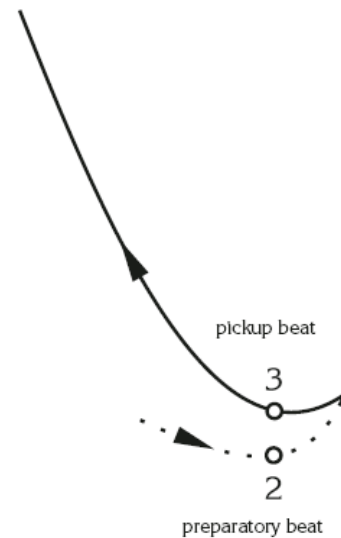
The Preparatory Beat

The purpose of the preparatory beat is to direct the breath prior to the vocal entrance. That breath should always be taken visibly by the conductor. It also cues the tempo, style and dynamics of the song. Once you have learned the basic patterns, it is easy to determine the timing for the preparatory beat. It is simply on the beat within the pattern prior to the vocal entrance.

PREPARATORY BEAT SINGING BEGINNING ON THE DOWNBEAT



PREPARATORY BEAT SINGING BEGINNING ON THE UPBEAT (PICK UP)



CONDUCTING CUT OFF ENDINGS TO A SONG

The cut off is the gesture which cues the singer when to stop singing. It is initiated with a "hold". Because the hand never stops moving, the "hold" is conducted with an outward movement until the cut off, which is demonstrated by a finger touch or a small circle.

CONDUCTING BREATHS

The breath can be conducted on any beat and depends entirely upon the interpretation and breathing plan created for the song. It is helpful to the singer if the breath always looks the same, that the conductor breaths along with the singer, and that the non-dominant hand (or that the non-dominant hand joins the dominant hand) to direct the breath.

LET'S CONDUCT – DEVELOPING YOUR STYLE

In barbershop music, we strive for continuous vocal lines and a fluid flow of music. The more comfortable you become, the more you will realize that less is more. As you experiment with patterns and gestures, just reach out to your singers with your hands, speak to your singers with your eyes, touch your singers with your heart, and stay true to the music. And relax and have fun!