

# 10 tips for singers new to choirs

It can be tough joining a new choir, especially if you're an under-confident singer. Here are ten tips to help you make the most of being in a choir:

1. **Everyone is in the same boat** – looking around, you might assume that everyone else is comfortable, confident and knows what they're doing, but you're wrong! You'd be surprised how many other people feel the same as you: they can't sing, they don't know what they're doing, everyone else is better than them, it's hard, etc. etc.
2. **Be patient** – if you're new to singing you might think that 'proper' singers can pick up a song by hearing it just once. They don't. Even for a professional singer, it might take up to six months for a new song to really settle in. So after the first stab at learning a new song and when you get home you can't remember a single word or even how the main tune goes, don't panic. Slowly, slowly over the coming weeks and months that part of your brain where songs live will absorb the song until it feels like you've known it forever.
3. **You are vitally important** – lots of new singers, especially those in large choirs, don't think they count. "They won't miss me if I don't turn up", "I'll just stand at the back and mime, nobody will notice." Wrong! If everyone thought that, there would be no choir at all. Everyone is a vital part of the greater whole. **Everyone** is equally responsible for creating that amazing sound.
4. **Sing loud and proud** – and don't care what anybody else thinks. If you're going to make a mistake, make a BIG mistake then you can fix it later. If you always sing hesitantly, you will never know if you're singing your part correctly or not. And if you don't like your voice at this stage, you still need to sing out loud and proud so it will develop over the coming weeks. If you sing quietly every week, you'll never get any better.
5. **Stand at the front** – it's natural, as a beginner, to want to hide at the back. You're nervous, don't think much of your voice, and you're not sure you've got the part right yet. But if you're at the back you can't hear the others in your part very well, won't hear what your director is saying and maybe not even be able to see their hand gestures. Scary as it is, if you stand at the front, you have the whole of your section backing you up and reinforcing your part by singing into your ear. The director will also be able to see if you're struggling with anything and be able to help you.
6. **Behave as if you know what you're doing** – it's amazing, but if you just behave AS IF you are a wonderful singer and know your part inside out, then it WILL HAPPEN! Just go for it.
7. **Smile!** – to help even more with looking like you know what you're doing. It will improve the resonance of your voice and your diction; even if you're feeling miserable it will cheer you up; and it will cheer up those around you and inspire them to sing better.
8. **Mind the gap!** – there are two main gaps to avoid. One is the gap between you and the other people in your part. Stick close to them and work as a team. You'll be amazed at how supportive that will feel.

The other gap is the one between different parts. If you're not comfortable (yet) with harmony singing, then standing right next to another part may well put you off at this stage. Make sure you're embedded well in the middle of your own part until you feel confident enough to enjoy the way harmonies work. Then you can head for the gaps between parts and enjoy the singing even more!

9. **If it's not working, change something** – anything: where you stand within your part; how you stand (are you in a balanced, easy position or do you slump to one side with your hands in your pockets?); change parts – the one you're in may be too high or low for you (although maybe just for this one song); your attitude – if at first hearing you don't 'like' a song, imagine it will become your favourite and give it even more attention than normal; become someone else (pretend you're Italian/ African/ a diva/ famous) as it helps to liberate you. The ultimate change is to change choirs if this one is not working for you.
10. **Don't switch off** – when the focus has moved on from your own part and others are learning theirs, it's all too easy to switch off and start daydreaming or (worse!) chatting. But this is a wonderful opportunity to stay focused (it's less tiring than switching off) and hear the words one more time, check that you've got the rhythm right, sing your part in your head at the same time (to feel how the harmonies work), and if you're getting pretty good at this choir lark, you can even learn another part.

So stick with it and you'll soon find the joys of singing in a group.









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## Musical Theory

### Note Values

Each different shape of note has a name and a value. There are two name systems in use- one is used in the UK and the other in the USA. Here are the main note values in order, and their names, starting with the longest note value:

Each note is worth half the value of the note before it in the list. So, a crotchet/quarter note is worth 2 quavers/eighth notes, and a minim/half note is worth 4 quavers/eighth notes.

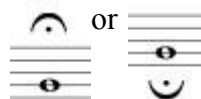
	UK Note Name	US Note Name		UK Note Name	US Note Name
	Breve	Double whole		Quaver	Eighth
	Semi-breve	Whole		Semi-quaver	Sixteenth
	Minim	Half		Demisemiquaver	Thirty-second
	Crotchet	Quarter		Hemidemisemiquaver	Sixty-fourth

### Dotted Notes

Notes can have one or two dots placed after them. A dot increases the value of the note by 50%. So, a dotted crotchet/quarter note is equal to 1.5 crotchets/quarter notes (or three quavers/eighth notes), and a dotted minim/half note is 1.5 minims/half notes (or three crotchets/quarter notes). A second dot increases the value of the note by 50% again. So, a double dotted crotchet/quarter note is worth 1.5 crotchets/quarter notes.

Notes can be tied together, with a small curved line. The values of tied notes should be added together and sung without a break.

Any note value can be increased by a short but indefinite amount of time with the use of the pause (or “fermata”) symbol:



## Rests

Rests work just like notes in notation, except of course you don't have to sing anything when there is a rest! Here are the rests, in the same order as the notes were written in point 2 above.

	UK Rest Name	US Rest Name		UK Rest Name	US Rest Name
	Breve	Double whole		Quaver	Eighth
	Semi-breve	Whole		Semi-quaver	Sixteenth
	Minim	Half		Demisemiquaver	Thirty-second
	Crotchet	Quarter		Hemidemisemiquaver	Sixty-fourth

Rests can be dotted in exactly the same way as notes can.

If you can't remember whether minim/half rests hang off or sit on the line, try to remember it this way: “4 is higher than 2”- so a 4 beat rest is higher up the stave than a 2 beat rest. Whole/semi-breve rests hang off the second line from the top, while half/minim rests sit on the middle line.

The semi-breve/whole rest can be used to show a complete bar of rest in any time signature (except 4/2 which needs 2 of them). The whole bar rest is placed in the middle of a bar.

## Bar lines and Navigating through a Piece of Music

Bar lines help you when you're reading music because they break the music up into small chunks which take up the same length of time.

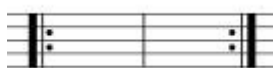
Bar lines are also used to divide longer music up into sections, and to show you which bars to repeat, if any.



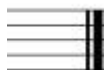
Single, thin bar line. Used as a general divider into bars.



Double thin bar line. Shows the end of a section, or when there is a key signature change.



Repeat bar lines. On reaching the left-facing (second) pair of dots, the music should be repeated from the right-facing (first) pair of dots. If there are no right-facing dots, the music should be repeated from the beginning.



Double bar line, thin + thick. Only used at the very end of a piece.

Other symbols are used to help you navigate your way through the score:

**D.C.** D.C. stands for Da Capo, which means “from the head”; or in other words, go back to the beginning.

**D.S.** D.S. stands for Dal Segno (pronounced SEN-yo), which means “from the sign”; or go back to the sign.

**§** This is the “sign” referred to by D.S.

**al Coda** Sing until you see the Coda sign.

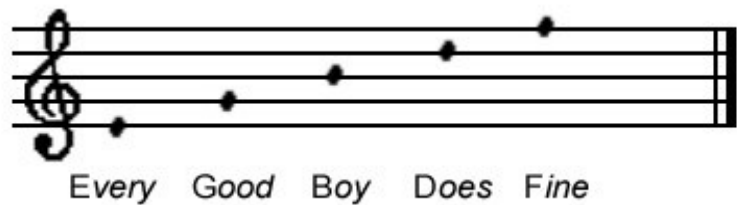
**⊕** Coda sign. Jump from here to the Coda (at the end of the piece), which will also be marked with this sign.

**al Fine** Sing until the end.

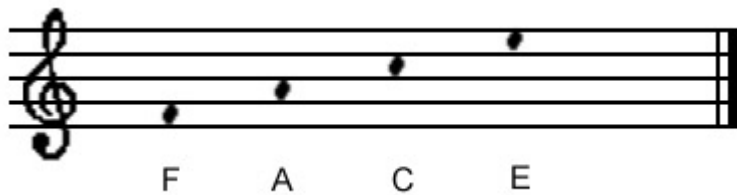
## Clefs

**The treble clef** is used for most musical voices including soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto, and tenor. The treble clef notes can be memorised by the following acronyms:

**Lines – Every Good Boy Does Fine**



**Spaces – F A C E**



**The bass clef** is used for the bass and baritone voices. The bass clef notes can be memorised by:

**Lines – Good Boys Do Fine Always**



**Spaces – All Cows Eat Grass**



## This page contains more advanced concepts do not worry if they do not make sense

### Intervals

An interval is the distance between two notes:



<b>Semitones</b>	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Interval</b>	Perfect Unison	Minor second (Semitone)	Major second (Whole tone)	Minor third	Major third	Perfect fourth
<b>Short</b>	U	m2	M2	m3	M3	P4
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Tritone	Perfect fifth	Minor sixth	Major sixth	Minor seventh	Major seventh	Perfect octave
TT	P5	m6	M6	m7	M7	P8

### Key Signatures

A key signature is a series of sharp or flat symbols placed on the staff, designating notes that are to be consistently sung one semitone higher or lower than the equivalent natural notes, unless altered with an accidental.

Below are the different key signatures in the treble and bass clefs:



### Accidentals

Accidentals consist of sharps (#), flats (b), and naturals (♮). A sharp raises the pitch of a note one semitone while a flat lowers it a semitone. A natural is used to cancel the effect of a flat or sharp in the key signature. Occasionally one may see double sharps or flats, which raise or lower the indicated note by a whole tone.







## Time Signatures

The time signature tells you **how many** beats there are in each bar, and **how long** each beat is.

A time signature is made up of 2 numbers, one written above the other. E.g.  $\frac{2}{4}$

The lower number tells you **what value** of note to count.

The numbers you can find in the lower position are:

1 =	Semi-breve (rare)		2 =	Minim	
4 =	Crotchet		8 =	Quaver	
16 =	Semi-quaver		32 =	Demisemiquaver (rare)	

The upper number tells you **how many** of these beats you need. So,  $\frac{2}{4}$  means we have 2 crotchets

per bar,  $\frac{6}{8}$  means we have 6 quavers per bar, and  $\frac{4}{2}$  means we have 4 minims per bar.

## Tempo

The tempo (or speed) of a piece of music is usually indicated at the beginning of the piece, and changes might occur during the piece. Tempo can be indicated with words (see Glossary), or symbols. Using symbols, tempo is indicated with a note value and the metronome marking it requires, for example like this:



A metronome marking of 60 means 60 clicks per minute (or one every second).

## Dynamics

Dynamics (or volume) can be indicated either in words (see Glossary), with abbreviations of those words, or with symbols. Immediate changes in dynamics are usually indicated with abbreviations:

*ppp* Pianississimo Very very quiet    *mf* Mezzo forte Moderately loud

*pp* Pianissimo Very quiet    *f* Forte Loud

*p* Piano Quiet    *ff* Fortissimo Very loud

*mp* Mezzo piano Moderately quiet    *fff* Fortississimo Very very loud

In addition, you might see *fp* which means sing loudly, but then immediately make the note quiet.

Gradual changes in dynamics are often indicated with hairpins like this:



Crescendo (cresc.) - Gradually get louder



Decrescendo (decresc.) - Gradually get quieter

You may also see Diminuendo (dim.) which means to fade away completely.

Hairpins are more precise than words because they can show more exactly where the change in dynamic starts and finishes.

## Phrasing and Articulation

Phrase marks are curved lines which group together notes which belong in one phrase, like this:



Individual notes can be sung in a huge number of ways, and so there are several “articulation” indications to show what you need to do. Some articulation indications only apply to certain instruments, while others are pretty much universal.

Here are the main articulation markings:



**Staccato** Detached (distinctly separate from the next note), and short.



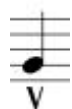
**Staccatissimo** Extremely detached and short.



**Tenuto** Hold the note for its full length.



**Accent** Attack the note with extra force.



**Marcato** Detach the note, but don't shorten it.

## Glossary

<b>A tempo</b>	In time	<b>Et</b>	And	<b>Pochettino</b>	Rather little
<b>Aber</b>	But	<b>Etwas</b>	Somewhat, rather	<b>Poco</b>	A little
<b>Accelerando (Accel)</b>	Gradually getting faster	<b>Facile</b>	Easy	<b>Possibile</b>	Possible
<b>Ad libitum (Ad lib.)</b>	At choice	<b>Fine</b>	The end	<b>Presser</b>	hurry
<b>Adagietto</b>	Rather slow	<b>Forte (F)</b>	Loud	<b>Presto</b>	Fast (faster than allegro)
<b>Adagio</b>	Slow	<b>Fortepiano (FP)</b>	Loud, then immediately soft	<b>Prima volta</b>	First time
<b>Affettuoso</b>	Tenderly	<b>Fortissimo (FF)</b>	Very Loud	<b>Prima, primo</b>	First
<b>Affrettando</b>	Hurrying	<b>Forza</b>	Force	<b>Quasi</b>	As if, resembling
<b>Agitato</b>	Agitated	<b>Fruhlich</b>	Cheerful, joyful	<b>Ralentir</b>	Slow down
<b>Al, alla</b>	In the style of	<b>Fuoco</b>	Fire	<b>Rallentando (Rall.)</b>	Gradually getting slower

<b>Alla breve</b>	With a minim beat	<b>Giocoso</b>	Playful, merry	<b>Retenu</b>	Held back
<b>Alla misura</b>	In strict time	<b>Giusto</b>	Proper, exact	<b>Rinforzando (RF, RFZ)</b>	Reinforcing
<b>Allargando</b>	Broadening	<b>Grave</b>	Very slow, solemn	<b>Risoluto</b>	Bold, strong
<b>Allegretto</b>	Fairly quick	<b>Grazioso</b>	Graceful	<b>Ritardando (Rit.)</b>	Gradually getting slower
<b>Allegro</b>	Fast	<b>Immer</b>	Always	<b>Ritenuto (Rit.)</b>	Held back
<b>Allegro assai</b>	Very fast	<b>Incalzando</b>	Getting quicker	<b>Ritmico</b>	Rhythmically
<b>Allegro moderato</b>	Moderately fast	<b>Lacrimoso</b>	Sad	<b>Rubato</b>	With some freedom of time
<b>Amabile</b>	Amiable, pleasant	<b>Langsam</b>	Slow	<b>Ruhig</b>	Peaceful
<b>Amore</b>	Love	<b>Largamente</b>	Broadly	<b>Sans</b>	Without
<b>Amoroso</b>	Loving	<b>Larghetto</b>	Rather slow	<b>Scherzando</b>	Playfully, joking
<b>Andante</b>	At a walking pace	<b>Largo</b>	Slow and stately	<b>Schnell</b>	Fast
<b>Andantino</b>	Slightly faster than andante	<b>Lebhaft</b>	Lively	<b>Seconda volta</b>	Second time
<b>Anima</b>	Spirit	<b>Legato</b>	Smoothly	<b>Seconda, secondo</b>	Second
<b>Animando</b>	Becoming more lively	<b>Legerement</b>	Light	<b>Segue</b>	Go straight on without stopping
<b>Animato</b>	Animated, lively	<b>Leggiero</b>	Light, nimble	<b>Sehr</b>	Very
<b>Anime</b>	Animated, lively	<b>Lent</b>	Slow	<b>Semplice</b>	Simple, plain
<b>Appassionato</b>	With passion	<b>Lento</b>	Slow	<b>Sempre</b>	Always
<b>Assai</b>	Very	<b>Lunga</b>	Long	<b>Senza</b>	Without
<b>Assez</b>	Enough	<b>Lunga pausa</b>	Long pause	<b>Senza misura</b>	In free time
<b>Attacca</b>	Go immediately to next section	<b>Lusingando</b>	Coaxing	<b>Sforzando (SF)</b>	Forced, accented
<b>Ausdruck</b>	Expression	<b>Ma</b>	But	<b>Sforzato (SFZ)</b>	Forced, accented
<b>Avec</b>	With	<b>Maestoso</b>	Majestic	<b>Simile (sim.)</b>	In the same way
<b>Ben</b>	Well	<b>Mais</b>	But	<b>Smorzando</b>	Dying away in tone and speed
<b>Bewegt</b>	With movement, agitated	<b>Marcato</b>	Emphatic, accented	<b>Sonoro</b>	Resonant, with a rich tone
<b>Breit</b>	Broad, expansive	<b>Marziale</b>	In a military style	<b>Sopra</b>	Above
<b>Brio</b>	Vigour	<b>Massig</b>	At a moderate speed	<b>Sostenuto</b>	Sustained
<b>Calando</b>	Getting softer, dying away	<b>Meno</b>	Less	<b>Sotto</b>	Below
<b>Cantabile</b>	In a singing style	<b>Mesto</b>	Sad	<b>Staccato (Stacc.)</b>	Detached
<b>Cantando</b>	Singing	<b>Mezzo</b>	Half	<b>Stringendo</b>	Gradually getting faster
<b>Cédez</b>	Yield, relax the speed	<b>Mezzo forte (MF)</b>	Moderately loud	<b>Subito</b>	Suddenly
<b>Come</b>	As, similar to	<b>Mezzo piano (MP)</b>	Moderately quiet	<b>Suss</b>	Sweet
<b>Comodo</b>	At a comfortable speed	<b>Misura</b>	Measure	<b>Tanta</b>	So much



<b>Con, col</b>	With	<b>Mit</b>	With	<b>Tempo</b>	Speed, time
<b>Crescendo (Cresc.)</b>	Gradually getting louder	<b>Moderato</b>	Moderate speed	<b>Teneramente</b>	Tenderly
<b>Da capo (DC)</b>	Repeat from beginning	<b>Modere</b>	At a moderate speed	<b>Tenerezza</b>	Tenderly
<b>Dal segno (DS)</b>	Repeat from "S" sign	<b>Moins</b>	Less	<b>Tenuto</b>	Held
<b>Deciso</b>	With determination	<b>Molto</b>	Very much	<b>Tosto</b>	Swift, Rapid
<b>Decrescendo (Decresc.)</b>	Gradually getting quieter	<b>Morendo</b>	Dying away	<b>Tranquillo</b>	Calm
<b>Delicato</b>	Delicate	<b>Mosso</b>	Movement	<b>Traurig</b>	Sad
<b>Diminuendo (Dim.)</b>	Gradually getting quieter	<b>Nicht</b>	Not	<b>Tres</b>	Very
<b>Dolce</b>	Sweet, soft	<b>Niente</b>	Nothing (silence)	<b>Tristamento, Triste</b>	Sorrowful
<b>Dolente</b>	Sad, mournful	<b>Nobilmente</b>	Nobly	<b>Troppo</b>	Too much
<b>Dolore</b>	Grief	<b>Non</b>	Not	<b>Un, Une</b>	One
<b>Doloroso</b>	Sorrowful	<b>Non</b>	Not	<b>Und</b>	And
<b>Doppio movimento</b>	Twice as fast	<b>Ohne</b>	Without	<b>Veloce</b>	Swift
<b>Douce</b>	Sweet	<b>Ossia</b>	Or, alternatively	<b>Vif</b>	Lively
<b>E, ed</b>	And	<b>Perdendosi</b>	Dying away	<b>Vite</b>	Quick
<b>Ein</b>	One	<b>Pesante</b>	Heavy	<b>Vivace, vivo</b>	Lively, quick
<b>Einfach</b>	Simple	<b>Peu</b>	Little	<b>Voce</b>	Voice
<b>En dehors</b>	Prominent	<b>Piacevole</b>	Pleasant	<b>Volante</b>	Flying, fast
<b>En pressant</b>	hurrying	<b>Piangevole</b>	Plaintive, like a lament	<b>Voll</b>	Full
<b>En retenant</b>	Holding back, slowing a little	<b>Pianissimo (PP)</b>	Very quiet	<b>Wenig</b>	Little
<b>Energico</b>	Energetic	<b>Piano (P)</b>	Quiet	<b>Wieder</b>	Again
<b>Espressivo</b>	Expressive	<b>Piu</b>	More	<b>Zart</b>	Tender, delicate
<b>Estinto</b>	As soft as possible	<b>Plus</b>	More	<b>Zu</b>	To, too