1. **Singing is a Physical Activity -** In order to be an excellent singer, we must be physically, mentally, and emotionally engaged in the process of singing without creating unnecessary tension in the body. You should literally be working your tail off, however, it should look and feel absolutely effortless. Remember your entire body is your instrument and it should be involved in the process.
2. **Whoa! That hole in your face is leaking! -** Before any sound ever comes out of your mouth, it should first be conceived in your mind. The vowel shape, the amount of air required, the meaning of the text, the contour of the phrase, etc…must be predestined by YOU. You must hear everything in your head before comes pouring out of your mouth. “Audiation” is just like visualization, however with sound! Ever had a song stuck in your head?
3. **Breathe in the space that you are going to sing.** - As you inhale, think about the first vowel “sound” you will make as you begin the phrase. (Ex. The word “when” is an “oo”) The shape of your mouth should match that vowel shape during the inhalation phase. Especially, for young singers, I find this to be beneficial in creating cleaner entrances. More advanced singers typically prefer to breathe in through the nose, as if smelling a rose.
4. **Open that Valve! - A**ir flow must begin before the vocal folds begin vibration. If we don’t keep the throat “open”, then the first sound that we make is most likely NOT “riding on a cushion of air”. Blowing the vocal cords apart often results with a “crack” or “pop” kind of sound as we begin the phrase and more often than not, it is out of tune as well. Some speech therapist refer to this as an “easy on-set”.
5. **Irritable Vowel Syndrome** – It is just as easy to sing with tall vowels as it is with wide ones. Make sure the soft palate remains high and lifted. (inner smile) Remember, nasal vowels do not exist in English, but vowels followed by “m”, “n” and “ng” can often become nasal if we are not careful. Mentally substitute alternative consonants at the end of the word to help palate remain high. Reminder: Diphthongs; first vowel is long, second one is short.
6. **The Secret to Life - Fight Gravity! –** Most of your phrase should feel “UP”. Overall singers generally sing “too heavy” much of the time. The text and articulation markings are your best guide in determining where you should text stress and/or add weight to the voice. Benjamin Zander refers to this as “one buttock” playing, or in our case singing.
7. **Is this thing an automatic or a straight-drive?** Terms like head voice and chest voice can be confusing to young singers, so I prefer “heavy or light mechanism”. Most of the time you will want to use light mechanism in choral singing (Unless you are singing with an Opera Chorus.) Maneuvering through the passagio (the passage) while balancing weight can be quite tricky. Women should lighten and thin approaching the register shift and then begin to add weight. Men, should stay light and focused in the lower voice and begin to slowly add weight approaching the passagio, but be careful, and NEVER try and muscle through it. Men will need to plan ahead moving into falsetto, you will want to “gear down” going up that hill.
8. **One of these is not like the other**  – Not every piece of music is the same, so don’t approach every piece the same way. So often I hear choirs perform and every single piece sounds exactly the same. Choral music can be exciting to sing and listen to! Don’t turn your audience off because you are too wrapped up in your own voice. The music dictates how you are to perform, not the other way around.
9. **Connect or Separate?** – Singers tend to sing legato too often. We simply love the way it feels when those vocal folds are just flapping together! However, this is not always the best musical choice and result in a very boring concert. Often, repeated notes require a bit of space between the notes or at least, pull back on force after the initial attack of the note. In addition to a cleaner articulation, it provides a sense of urgency to the phrase and forward momentum throughout the phrase. Key terms: Legato, Marcato, Staccato, Tenuto, Accent, Sforzando.
10. **Hey! What about me?** Don’t forget about the dot! When performing dotted rhythms we basically have 3 choices. 1- Simply hold the note its full value. 2- Sing into ( re-sing / energize) the beat on which the dot resides. This adds energy to the longer value and stresses the preceding beat or 3- Back off the air pressure on the dot and use it like a spring board to propel and emphasize the following note. Your text will largely determine which of these options are best.
11. **It’s always good to be a little “SAS” sy** **-** Generally, as pitch ascends we need to add a) more Support, b) more Air, and c) more Space *(inside)*. Remember to LIFT into the high notes, never PUSH. Women should modify vowels to a more OPEN vowel. Men should modify vowels toward a more CLOSED vowel, (especially on the “eh” vowel)
12. **Never Louder Than Lovely -** We all have that point in our voice when the sound we produce ceases to be beautiful and becomes unpleasant to listen to…(and often unpleasant to sing.) Sometimes referred to it as - *“Singing over the ugly line”* OR “*Singing outside the beauty box”,* the intent remains the same. If you are unsure if you are pushing the dynamic limits a bit too far, just ask your neighbor, I am SURE they will be happy to tell you!
13. **If You Don’t Feel it, I Don’t Hear It -** The amount of energy behind our consonants determines whether or not the audience will understand text. Some consonants like “s”,“sh”, and “z” are easily heard and therefore, need almost NO air pressure behind them. However, sounds like “k”, “g”, “p”, “t”, “v” and “f” are very hard to hear and require much more air pressure in order for them to be understood when singing.
14. **On Time is Late** – While this also applies to call times, in this case, it is about singing on the beat. If your articulation is slow, or behind the beat, you are just as wrong as if you sang a wrong note. So, why not be at least half right and sing on time. The vocal cords should be vibrating at the beginning of the beat. Unvoiced consonants should slightly precede the beat
15. **Get the “L” out of the way and move your bloomin’ “R’s”** – Two of the most restrictive consonants are the “l” and the “r”. Both of these consonants can cause tension in the tongue and throat with the potential to restrict air flow as well as contribute to decreased oral and pharyngeal resonance.
16. **Sing THROUGH it – not TO it!** - Don’t make a habit of “hanging out” on long notes until it is time to move on to the next note or to take a breath. By feeding air to every portion of the beat, long notes will remain energized and vibrant! In other words - “NO LOITERING” – especially at the end of a phrase.
17. **Ride the Wave!** – A phrase in choral singing is largely dictated by the text, but in general, think of singing a musical phrase like riding the wave of the ocean. It should feel fluid and possess a sense of buoyancy. Think “Tide in a Tide out”.
18. **Laser Beam or Blow Torch** – Regardless how musical the choir is, no one wants to hear it if you are not singing in tune. A blow torch approach results in a “thick” pitch. Think of focusing your sound much like a camera lens. If the camera is not in focus, the picture comes out “fuzzy”. Aim for the center of the pitch – Close only counts in horse shoes!
19. **Practice does NOT make perfect, Perfect practice makes perfect.** If you practice incorrectly you are only learning how to perform wrong REALLY well. Be systematic in your approach to rehearsal and you find you will be much more successful. Practice is like brushing your teeth – every day is better than once a week!
20. **Yes! It’s worth the effort.** Being a part of an excellent choral ensemble can be exhausting but it can also be very rewarding! The ensemble is dependent on the collective to be at its best and every individual makes a valuable contribution to the whole.

The better prepared you are for a rehearsal, the more we can achieve.

The better prepared we are for a performance, the more you will receive.