

# Making the Grade: Current Trends in Music Assessment

Mitchell Robinson, Ph.D.  
College of Music

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY



# Terms

- **Assessment:** Gathering information about student learning in a broad manner. Can be organized in portfolios.
- **Measurement:** Using objective, reliable methodology to observe musical behaviors. Rubrics are measurements.
- **Evaluation:** Comparing evidence of assessment in relation to a standard. Grading is a form of evaluation.

# Changes in Assessment

Conventional Assessment vs. Alternative Assessment

- approach

Both Have a Place in

Multiple Measures Assessment

- non-

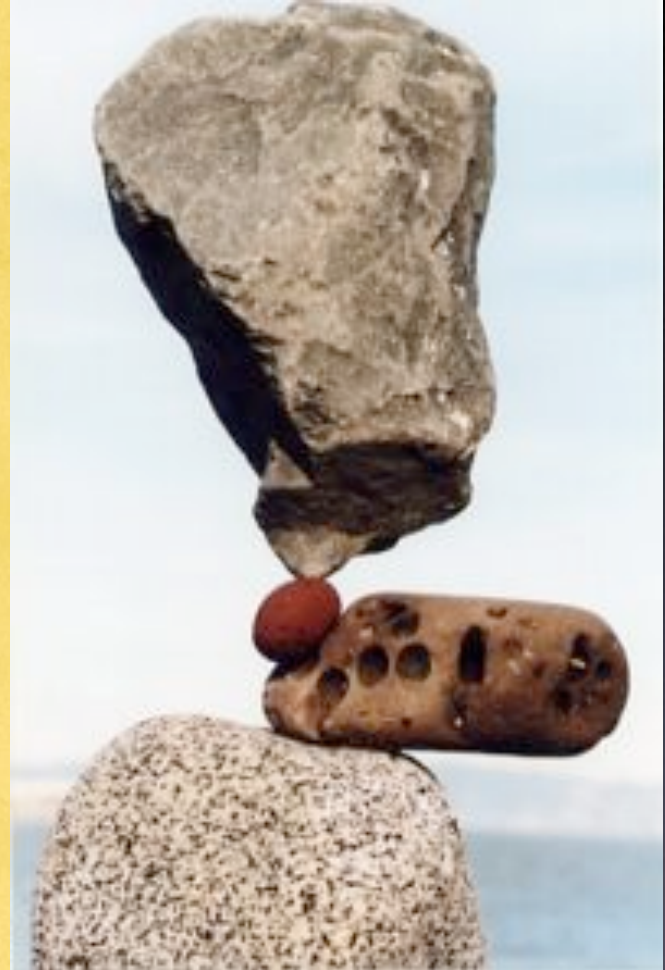
- teacher-

- related

From: V. Perrone (Ed.), (1991). Expanding Student Assessment, Alexandria, VA: ASCD..

# Assessment Stances

***Should Be  
Operating in  
Balance***



# Forms of Alternative Assessment

- Performance-Based Assessment
- Student Auditions
- Solo/Ensemble Festivals
- Critiques of Student Compositions
- Coaching Jazz Improvisation
- Playing Checks



# Rating Scales & Rubrics

- Criteria-Specific Rating Scales
  - Continuous Rating Scales
  - Additive Rating Scales
- Rubrics\*; should include:
  - points that are equidistant
  - 4 or more rating points
  - descriptors that are valid and reliable



# Student Writing

- Concert Reviews
- Journal Keeping
- Interviews
- Creative Writing



# Seating Chart

M + B -	M - B -	M + B -	M B
M ! B -	M ! B -	didn't sing at all today	M ! B -
M + B +	M B	M + B ?	M ! B !

M = melody  
B = bass melody

Key: ! = excellent  
+ = good  
- = needs assistance  
? = check again



# Rating Scales

Playing Check #1		Playing Check #2			
Tone	0-20	<input type="text"/>	Tonal Accuracy/Intonation	0-5	<input type="text"/>
<i>Quality</i>			(circle the highest level of achievement attained)		
<i>Control/Focus</i>			5	<i>Accurate and precise pitch and notes</i>	
<i>Breath Support</i>			4	<i>Imprecise pitch—accurate notes</i>	
<i>Projection</i>			3	<i>Few inaccurate notes</i>	
<i>Vibrato</i>			2	<i>Performed with an overall sense of tonality</i>	
<i>Embouchure</i>			1	<i>Performed with a focused tone</i>	
<i>Posture</i>					
Intonation	0-10	<input type="text"/>	Rhythmic Accuracy	0-5	<input type="text"/>
<i>Tuning</i>			(circle the highest level of achievement attained)		
<i>Tonality</i>			5	<i>Accurate and precise tempo, meter, and melodic rhythms</i>	
Accuracy	0-15	<input type="text"/>	4	<i>Mostly accurate, few imprecise rhythms</i>	
<i>Accuracy of Notes</i>			3	<i>Consistent tempo, steady meter, but wrong rhythms</i>	
<i>Accuracy of Rhythms</i>			2	<i>Portions of consistent tempo and steady meter</i>	
<i>Steadiness of Rhythms</i>			1	<i>Inconsistent tempo, no sense of meter</i>	
<i>Pulse</i>					
Total Points (0-45)		_____	Total Points (0-10)		_____

Should be:

- criteria-specific
- objective
- easy to use
- clear

# A video example...



# Rating Scales

Playing Check #1		Playing Check #2			
Tone	0-20	<input type="text"/>	Tonal Accuracy/Intonation	0-5	<input type="text"/>
<i>Quality</i>			(circle the highest level of achievement attained)		
<i>Control/Focus</i>			5	<i>Accurate and precise pitch and notes</i>	
<i>Breath Support</i>			4	<i>Imprecise pitch—accurate notes</i>	
<i>Projection</i>			3	<i>Few inaccurate notes</i>	
<i>Vibrato</i>			2	<i>Performed with an overall sense of tonality</i>	
<i>Embouchure</i>			1	<i>Performed with a focused tone</i>	
<i>Posture</i>					
Intonation	0-10	<input type="text"/>	Rhythmic Accuracy	0-5	<input type="text"/>
<i>Tuning</i>			(circle the highest level of achievement attained)		
<i>Tonality</i>			5	<i>Accurate and precise tempo, meter, and melodic rhythms</i>	
Accuracy	0-15	<input type="text"/>	4	<i>Mostly accurate, few imprecise rhythms</i>	
<i>Accuracy of Notes</i>			3	<i>Consistent tempo, steady meter, but wrong rhythms</i>	
<i>Accuracy of Rhythms</i>			2	<i>Portions of consistent tempo and steady meter</i>	
<i>Steadiness of Rhythms</i>			1	<i>Inconsistent tempo, no sense of meter</i>	
<i>Pulse</i>					
Total Points (0-45)		_____	Total Points (0-10)		_____

Should be:

- criteria-specific
- objective
- easy to use
- clear

# What does a rubric look like?

- types include holistic (overall performance) and analytic (specific dimensions of performance); both are necessary for student assessment
- the scale includes (preferably) 4 rating points
- the points of the scale are equidistant on a continuum
- the highest point represents exemplary performance
- descriptors are provided for each level of student performance
- descriptors are valid (meaningful) and scores are reliable (consistent)
- scores are related to actual levels of students learning
- can be used by students for self-assessment and to assess the performance of other students

# Create A Rubric

## Why Bother?

- Helps plan activities
- Focuses your objectives
- Aids in evaluation and grading
- Improves instruction

# Sample Rubric: Vocal Quality

<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
<b>Breathy; Unclear; Lacks focus; Unsupported</b>	<b>Inconsistent; Beginning to be centered and clear; Breath support needs improvement</b>	<b>Consistent breath support; Centered and clear; Beginning to be resonant</b>	<b>Resonant; Centered; Vibrant; Projecting</b>

# Student Writing

- give to students before they begin writing
- make it specific to your assignment
- works best with older students
- allow many revisions (potentially unlimited)

MUS277: Principles of Music Education Project 1 Rubric				
Categories	Performance Continuum (circle the appropriate box in each row)			
	1	2	3	4
<b>Content</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body of paper presents a solid argument, adequately supported by evidence, citations</li> <li>• Questions in assignment are adequately addressed</li> <li>• Evidence for opinions is founded on research and professional literature</li> <li>• Personal experiences are used to provide context for the author's argument(s)</li> </ul>	<p>The thesis of the paper is never announced (i.e., there is no sentence like "I believe that the purpose of music in the schools is...").</p> <p>Even a reader familiar with your premise and topic often wonders what you are trying to say.</p>	<p>The thesis of the paper (i.e., "I believe that the purpose of music in the schools is...") is not announced in the introductory paragraphs, and is only referred to obliquely throughout.</p> <p>Only a reader familiar with your premise and topic almost never wonders what you are trying to say.</p>	<p>The thesis of the paper (i.e., "I believe that the purpose of music in the schools is...") is announced but is formulated unclearly or vaguely in the introductory paragraphs.</p> <p>Even a reader unfamiliar with your premise and topic almost never wonders what you are trying to say.</p>	<p>The thesis of the paper (i.e., "I believe that the purpose of music in the schools is...") is announced and is formulated clearly and precisely in the introductory paragraphs.</p> <p>Even a reader unfamiliar with your premise and topic feels comfortable reading the paper.</p>
<b>Mechanics &amp; Style</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proper margins, Page #s, Line spacings</li> <li>• Citations in consistent bibliographic format</li> <li>• Ideas presented in a logical sequence, Complete paragraphs, Development of a cogent conclusion</li> <li>• Correct spelling, Punctuation, Grammar, Sentence Construction, Proper word usage and appropriate vocabulary</li> </ul>	<p>The style is inappropriate for a scholarly paper: it is too colloquial, too impassioned, too flowery, or too impressionistic.</p> <p>There are so many grammatical, syntactic, spelling, or punctuation mistakes that the reader is distracted and has difficulty focusing on the argumentation.</p>	<p>The style is scholarly (in general sober and factual) but the paper is dry as a result: the reader feels bored.</p> <p>There are several grammatical, syntactic, spelling, or punctuation mistakes, causing some distraction to the reader.</p>	<p>The style is scholarly (in general sober and factual) but the paper is still lively: the reader feels interested.</p> <p>There are few grammatical, syntactic, spelling, or punctuation mistakes; the reader can focus on the content with little distraction.</p>	<p>The style is scholarly (in general sober and factual) but engages the reader: the reader feels drawn in to the topic because of the writing.</p> <p>The writing is error-free, allowing the reader to focus entirely on the content.</p>

# The Morning After...

- focuses student listening
- guides students to attend to musical aspects of performance
- can be done in groups
- encourages comparison and contrast judgments

## Ensemble Performance Ratings

Our Ensemble		Other Ensemble
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Tone Quality</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tone quality is not affected adversely by pitch range.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs with resonant tone quality.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs consistently with centered tone.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tone quality is consistently supported.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tone quality is not thin or breathy.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Intonation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Intonation is not affected adversely by dynamics.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pitches are performed accurately.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs with an accurate sense of tonality.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Intonation is not affected adversely by breath support.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Intonation is accurate in extreme registers of pitch.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Rhythmic Accuracy</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Entrances and release are executed together.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs accurately the melodic rhythm (extensions of beat).	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs accurately the melodic rhythm (subdivisions of beat).	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs with a correct sense of meter.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs with consistent tempo.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Dynamics</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Crescendos of even growth of sound.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decrescendos of even dissipation of sound.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dynamics are performed accurately and stylistically.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dynamic contrast heard within music sections.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dynamic contrast heard between music sections.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Expression</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Proper style in regard to historical period or cultural tradition.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is a sense of arsis ("lifting") and thesis ("setting") within phrases.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs with a sense of tempo rubato when appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble performs in a tempo that is stylistically and technically appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spirited communication rather than a mechanical presentation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Balance and Blend</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Balance/blend is not affected adversely by pitch range.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Melody is heard distinctly.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Firm harmonic contribution of inner voices.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble is not dominated by one or more sections.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensemble is not dominated by one or more individual performers.	<input type="checkbox"/>



# Student Writing

- make the assignment age-appropriate
- ask students to make musical judgments
- encourage critical evaluation, not criticism
- great opportunity for involving other faculty

## Choir Opens Season With A Bang

by Sipra Agrawal

The 1995-96 Brighton Concert Choir opened their season with a powerful concert Thursday night, and as an avid performer and listener of the choir over the last four years it is safe to say that the choir gave the best performance in years last night.

“Dies Irae,” the opening number, was just what an opener should be: direct, intense, and emotional. The attacks at the beginning of each phrase brought out the song’s fiery nature. The sound was very good, as one audience member noted; the basses could really be heard, so the underlying sound was excellent.

“Lonesome Road,” the second selection, was remarkably sung in that the choir never swerved from pitch even when sung a cappella (unaccompanied). This was a remarkable improvement particularly since as recently as a week before the concert, the choir would go as much as a whole step flat on this piece. ~~\*\*\*\*\*~~, the tenor soloist, sang well but could have been a bit more forceful as the back row had to strain to hear. But in all fairness those who heard were pleased with \*\*\*\*\*’s sensitivity on the solo.

In the middle of the program, the choir sang “Something Told The Wild Geese” by Sherri Porter. Though a beautiful song, it was the low point of the performance. The blend and sound were superior, but breaths were taken in the middle of phrases and cutoffs, especially on the word “ice.” No one likes to hear the hissing of ss’s for prolonged periods of time.

The high point of the evening was the performance of “Ain’-a That Good News,” a gospel tune sung a cappella. The thing that made this piece swing was the cutoffs done so perfectly together that the reverberations could be heard echoing throughout the auditorium. The sopranos were the driving force in keeping energy high as well as pitch. The piece, in a word, ROCKED.

Brahms’ “Lass Dich Nur Nichts Nicht Dauren (Let Nothing Ever Grieve Thee)”--accompanied by chamber orchestra--and “Dance a Cachuca” from The Gondoliers completed the program, with senior \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* helping to set the appropriate mood by introducing each selection with program notes.

Overall, the choir can be proud of its accomplishments in establishing a name for itself on Thursday and singing such a range of musical styles with sensitivity, flexibility, and style.

*Introduction*

*Critical evaluation of individual sections of the ensemble*

*Evaluation of an individual soloist*

*Recognition of both less successful and outstanding aspects of the performance--reflects the ability to make a balanced criticism or judgment*

*Summation*

# Journal Keeping

- stenographer's notebooks work best
- younger students need more directed writing assignments
- try to avoid the "pizza & pop" syndrome
- teacher feedback is essential

Student's comments

*Fall Preview Concert  
Concert Evaluation #2*

*"I liked Jupiter the best—it is such a flowing, emotional piece. I think we've played it better before, but it was still the one of the best pieces.*

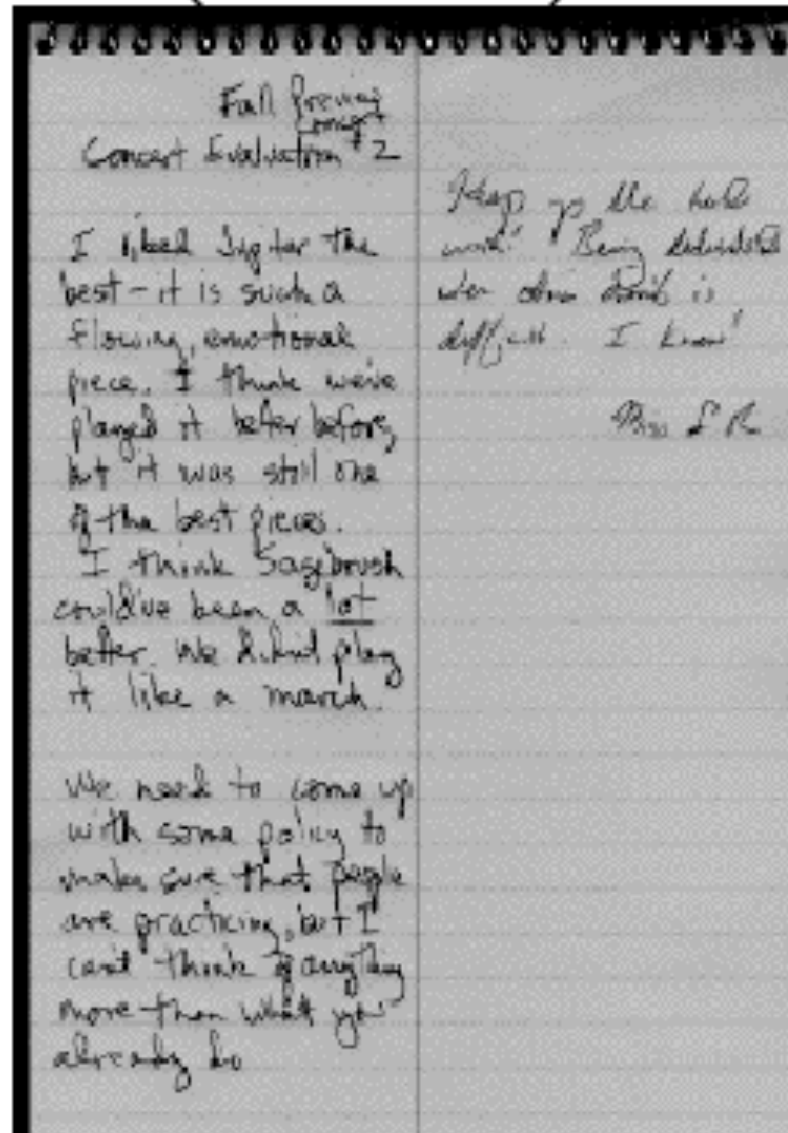
*I think Sagebrush could've been a lot better. We didn't play it like a march.*

*We need to come up with some policy to make sure that people are practicing, but I can't think of anything more than what you already do."*

Teacher's response

*"Keep up the hard work! Being dedicated when others aren't is difficult. I know!"*

*Miss R.*



# What Should Music Teachers Do?

## Festival Ratings?

- don't measure individual growth
- issues with reliability and validity
- measure narrow aspects of music learning
- most music teachers disagree with their use in teacher evaluation



# What Should Music Teachers Do?

## Acceptable Forms of Evidence

- Standardized test scores: **No**
- 3rd party assessments: **Be careful**
- State exams: **Maybe**
- District/locally-developed assessments: **Best**



# Michigan Arts Education Instruction and Assessment Project

<http://mi-arts.wikispaces.com>

- Item Types:
  - Performance Tasks: prompts that require students to spend days, weeks, or months in preparing a response
  - Performance Events: on-demand performance assessment items that require students to construct a response in a very brief period of time
  - Constructed-Response Items: items that require the individual to create their own answer(s) rather than select from prewritten options
  - Selected-Response Items: includes multiple-choice, true-false, matching, and other types of items in which students are provided with a variety of responses



advancing creativity in education

# Learning Point OnCore™

- 30-40 minutes
- online administration
- \$4.50 per student
- 3000 students = \$13,500



# Types of Portfolios



Portfolio Type

Photographic Analogy

**Presentation/Product**

**Artist's Portfolio**

Uses...

- seek admission to school
- interview for a job
- formulate summative (final) grades

# Types of Portfolios



Portfolio Type

Photographic Analogy

**Product/Performance**

**Class Picture**

Uses...

- collects same product from all students at same time
- ranking/sorting instrument for class measurement and evaluation



# Types of Portfolios



Portfolio Type

Photographic Analogy

Program

Formal Portrait

Uses...

- represents best work of a group of students over time
- allows for performance-based assessment of student progress

# Types of Portfolios



Portfolio Type

Photographic Analogy

Process

Scrap Book/Photo Album

Uses...

- includes early and perhaps less successful examples of student work
- creative process is clearly seen

# Limitations



# Questions, Comments...

Mitchell Robinson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Chair, Music Education

College of Music

Michigan State University

East Lansing, Michigan 48824

phone: 517.355.7555

email: [mrob@msu.edu](mailto:mrob@msu.edu)

