



# Ensemble Precision

What is ensemble precision and why is it important to making music?




## Warm-Up activity: What is the difference between these two recordings?

Here are two versions of the same song by Michael Jackson, his hit “Bad”. The instruments used and the recording of him singing are exactly the same, but somehow one of these recording sounds good and one sounds “off”. Listen to both and try and figure out what is different between them. Write down a description of what you think the difference is.

“Good” version of *Bad*

“Bad” version of *Bad*



# The difference you are trying to describe is called “ensemble precision”

You probably noticed that the second video included the description “(All Instruments Off Tempo)”. We will explore the concept of “tempo” in another lesson, but when different musicians playing together aren’t keeping the beat at the same, that makes it hard for them to stay together on the beat. This is a big factor in ensemble precision.

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So what is “ensemble precision”? Check it out

## Ensemble Precision - Definition

How tightly together a group of musicians (ensemble) sync up to each other, including their sense of beat, their entrances and cut offs, and the rhythms they are playing.



# So how do we evaluate or measure ensemble precision?

If you are trying to evaluate how well an ensemble is playing together, here is a list of things you can listen for:

- Everyone keeping the beat together
  - No one rushing the tempo or going too slow
- Everyone entering at the same time in a new section
- Everyone cutting off together at the same time
- The words being sung sync up with each other
  - If this ISN'T happening, the words will sound messy or mumbled
- The overall effect of the music should could be described as “crip” or “clean” if the ensemble precision of the group is being successful



# Let's evaluate some Ensemble Precision!

Now that you have a sense of what “ensemble precision” is, let's try and evaluate how successful a few different ensembles are in their ensemble precision! For the sake of this exercise, we are going to use the ensemble rating system that judges use at large ensemble contests for choirs, orchestras and bands. That means, as you evaluate, come up with a rating between 1 (the best you can do) and 5 (the worst you can do). We will evaluate three ensembles different ensembles performing three different pieces of music.

1

2

3

4

5

Exemplary   Outstanding   Satisfactory   Developing   Ineffective

# Ensemble #1: "Milwaukee Children's Choir"

This is a volunteer children's choir singing the Israeli song "Dodi Li".



# Ensemble #1: “Worst Choir Ever”

This choir has quite a few issues, but definitely one of them is their ensemble precision!



## Ensemble #3: “BBC Virtual Choir”

In this virtual choir, the singers had to of creating ensemble precision without getting to sing together! Each singer recorded themselves singing to the accompaniment track, and then they spliced it all together at the end. Pretty cool!





## Ensemble #4: “Ensemble Orlando Fribourg”

This is a complicated choir piece by Johann Sebastian Bach called “Christ Lag in Totesbanden”. For this example, just listen to the second movement (minutes 1.40-5.55)





## Extension activity for more challenge!

Now, find some recording of your own choir or the other choirs at your school, and evaluate their performances for “ensemble precision”.

How did you do? Write down ideas for how your groups could improve in their ensemble precision and remember that the next time you are in a choir or other ensemble preparing music!