



Music Performance Assessments

2025

GUIDE TO PARTICIPATING IN A CHORAL MPA

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INTRODUCTION

The fundamental goals of this *Guide* have not changed since the first *Manual* was released in 1986:

- To provide directors with the information needed to successfully host an MPA
- To answer common questions about hosting an MPA
- To provide an ongoing reference for those who have hosted in the past
- To identify any changes and new aspects of hosting
- To provide practical suggestions for hosts, especially those new to hosting MPA's

In turn, feedback is welcomed from all involved for this Guide to best serve as a relevant resource.

The name of this program changed from "PMEA Adjudication" to "PMEA Music Performance Assessment" in 2019. The events themselves continue to be called "MPAs" or "Music Performance Assessments." This change simplifies and clarifies 'what we are' and focus upon 'what we do'-----*music performance assessment*.

All forms and items needed to participate in and to host an MPA are posted within the Music Performance Assessment area of the PMEA website at www.pmea.net.

The following forms are used when participating in a Choral MPA:

- [Choral Music Performance Assessment Form](#)
- [Medals Order Form](#) *(Optional)*
- [Selective Music List Requests Form](#) *(if needed)*

Online forms for each MPA linked within the MPA Calendar include the followings:

- *Registration Form*
- *Declaring Prepared Pieces Form*

Contact Tom Snyder, MPA Coordinator, with questions at mpa@pmea.net or **(724) 816-0420**.

SECTION 1: CHORAL MPA'S - THE SYSTEM

A. GOALS

- The overall goals of the *PMEA Music Performance Assessment* program include:
 - To provide interscholastic, educationally valid assessment contexts in which any instrumental or vocal music student from Pennsylvania schools may participate
 - To foster musical achievement
 - To provide extrinsic recognition for the musical achievement of individuals and ensemble through plaques, certificates, and medals
 - To enable directors to select repertoire appropriate for their large ensembles from graded levels of music within the *PMEA Selective Music Lists*
 - To provide students and directors the opportunity to hear performances by ensembles and soloists from other schools when possible

B. MUSIC PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM INFRASTRUCTURE

- The *Music Performance Assessment Coordinator* is initially responsible for administering the MPA system, to promote participation by PMEA member directors and their students, to chair the *PMEA MPA Committee*, and to attend the annual meetings of the Student Performance Events Council (SPEC) as a voting member. The MPA Coordinator reports to the Chair of the Student Performance Events Council, the PMEA President and the PMEA Executive Director.
- The *PMEA MPA Committee* meets annually at the annual PMEA In-Service Conference to provide input concerning direction, policies and procedures. The PMEA MPA Committee is informally composed of the PMEA District MPA Reps, all MPA hosts, and the chair of the MPA Music Review Committee, currently Dr. Tad Greig (Westminster College – Retired) for Band and Orchestra and Dr. Ryan Keeling for Chorus (Westminster College). All participating directors and other interested PMEA members are welcome to attend and actively participate in the dialogue.

C. TYPES OF MPA'S

- The following types of Music Performance Assessments (MPA's) are currently available:
 - BAND & ORCHESTRA Band, Full Orchestra, and String Orchestra
 - CHORUS Mixed Chorus, Treble Chorus, and Tenor-Bass Chorus
 - SOLO & SMALL ENSEMBLE Woodwind, Brass, Percussion, String and Vocal
 - JAZZ ENSEMBLE
- PMEA Music Performance Assessment does not currently provide an MPA for Vocal Jazz Choirs or Show Choirs.

D. ELIGIBILITY

- Participating directors are urged to be members of PMEA. If the director is not a PMEA member, \$50 will be added to the Registration Fee. Ensembles from neighboring states are welcome to participate at the member rate if the director is a NAFME member in that state.

- A student must be enrolled in an ensemble’s curricular class to participate with that ensemble in an MPA. A student may not participate in more than one ensemble unless the student is enrolled in each ensemble’s curricular class. Directors with ensemble members participating within extenuating scheduling circumstances are urged to contact the MPA Coordinator.

E. CALENDAR

- The most current *MPA Calendar*, listing dates, sites, hosts, contact information, and links to online Registration forms, is posted within the [Music Performance Assessment](#) area of the [PMEA website](#).

F. SCHEDULING PERFORMANCE TIMES

- The Host schedules performance times. Directors are urged to verify participation early while also confirming a viable performance time given travel distance and return time parameters.
- Scheduling as soon as possible is even more essential for schools planning to bring more than one ensemble, especially those with the same director.
- Directors are also encouraged to include time to watch other ensembles when possible.

G. PERFORMANCE CONTEXT: TRADITIONAL OR FESTIVAL

- Directors may choose to participate in either the *Traditional* or the *Festival* performance context. The *Traditional* context is the most common nationally. The *Festival* context, unique to PA, includes a menu of available options for directors to customize a performance assessment experience that best meets the needs of their students at that time.

- **TRADITIONAL:**

- **Three Prepared Pieces from the PMEA Selective Music List**

Directors may complete the online *Selective Music List Requests* form to request permission to perform a piece not on the SML, to perform fewer movements of a piece or parts of a collection at a lower grade level than listed for the entire piece, or for a piece to be reviewed to possibly be reclassified at a higher or lower grade level than listed.

- **Ratings & Audio/Written Commentary**

Ensembles receive audio commentary in real time and written comments on the Assessment Form from each adjudicator in the auditorium

- **Wording for Award Plaque**

Directors are asked to choose which rating terminology to include on the PMEA Award Plaque, either the traditional PMEA terms (Superior, Excellent, Good or Fair) or the terms adapted from PSSA’s (Outstanding, Advanced, Proficient or Basic).

- **Medals (Optional)**

Directors of ensembles that earn a rating of *I: Superior/Outstanding*, *II: Excellent/Advanced* or *III: Good/Proficient* have the option to use the [PMEA MPA Medal Order Form](#) to order medals for their students to proudly display evidence of their ensemble’s achievement on their concert attire and graduation robes.

- **FESTIVAL:**
 - **Three Selections of Choice**
Directors may choose any three pieces as their Prepared Pieces from among what is already being rehearsed in class. The pieces are not required to be included within the *PMEA Selective Music List*. The grade levels of the pieces are not required to be submitted.
 - **Assessment Options**
Directors may choose to receive **Ratings & Comments** through the real-time audio commentary and the ratings and written comments using the Assessment Form **OR Comments Only** with the same commentary but with no scoring or ratings issued.
 - **Wording for Award Certificate if Ratings & Comments Assessment Option is Selected**
Directors are asked to choose which rating terminology to include on the official PMEA Award Certificate recognizing participation, either the traditional assessment terms (Superior, Excellent, Good or Fair) or the terms adapted from PSSA's (Outstanding, Advanced, Proficient or Basic).
- A side-by side comparison of both performance contexts follows:

MPA PARTICIPATION	TRADITIONAL	FESTIVAL
Choice of Repertoire	Three pieces selected from the PMEA Selective Music List (SML) or as approved	Any three pieces that the ensemble is already rehearsing whether or not they are listed within the PMEA SML
Grade Level	Declared by the director from the graded repertoire included in the PMEA SML or as approved	Grade levels do not need to be declared.
Scoring and resulting Rating using the PMEA Assessment Forms	Included	Optional
Adjudicator Comments through digital audio commentary in real time and written on the PMEA Assessment Form	Included	Included
Award Recognition	PMEA Award Plaque	PMEA Award Certificate
Rating Terminology	A choice between Superior/Excellent/Good/Fair or Outstanding/Advanced/Proficient/Basic as adapted from PSSA terminology	If receiving a Rating, a choice between Superior/Excellent/Good/Fair or Outstanding/Advanced/Proficient/Basic as adapted from PSSA terminology
Individual Student Medals	Optional – purchased separately	Not available

H. REGISTRATION

- The PMEA office generates an online *Registration Form* customized for each MPA linked within the MPA Calendar document posted within the PMEA website. Directors click on that link to complete and submit the Registration Form that provides both hosts and PMEA with information necessary for planning. Directors are recommended to register online as soon as permission to participate is confirmed and immediately contact the host to confirm a performance time.

- Directors are asked to mail a check for the Registration Fee issued payable to PMEA to be received by the host no later than three weeks in advance of the MPA. PMEA will send a confirmation email with a copy of the completed online Registration Form for directors to print and use as an invoice if needed. Contact the MPA Coordinator if a different invoice format is needed.
 - Registration fee for an Ensemble participating in the *Traditional* performance context = \$235
 - Registration fee for an Ensemble participating in the *Festival* performance context = \$200
 - The difference in the registration fees is the approximate cost of the Award Plaque and its mailing compared to that of the Award Certificate.
- Directors must complete the online *Registration and Declaring Prepared Pieces* forms for each of their participating ensembles and submit payment for the Registration Fee to confirm participation.
- Registration fee checks may be refunded if the ensemble withdraws two weeks or more before the MPA. The Registration fee will not be refunded for an ensemble that withdraws within two weeks of the MPA, a policy intended to discourage withdrawals for non-extenuating reasons, such as preparation concerns or ineffective planning. Extenuating circumstances will be considered. Being notified two weeks or more in advance enables the host to best adjust schedules to benefit all involved.
- For large ensemble MPA's, information is compiled from the submitted online registration forms submitted about the ensembles and schools. Unique to Pennsylvania, this 'Ensemble Profile' document is provided to the adjudicators to enhance their awareness, perspectives, and overall frame of reference within which each performance is perceived and assessed according to the performance level standards.

I. DECLARING PREPARED PIECES FOR PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

- Directors are required to declare their three required Prepared Pieces within the online *Declaring Prepared Pieces* form customized for each MPA linked within the MPA Calendar document posted within the PMEA website. Within this form, directors provide the Title, Composer/Arranger, Year Published and, for *Traditional*, the approved PMEA Grade Level for each piece.
- Next on that form, directors provide the 'Declared Summary Grade Level for PMEA Performance Assessment'. If all three pieces are at the same grade level, that would be the Declared Summary Grade Level. If the three pieces are at different grade levels no more than two levels apart, the Declared Summary Grade Level would be as indicated within the table below:

PIECE 1	PIECE 2	PIECE 3	DECLARED SUMMARY GRADE LEVEL FOR PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT
1	1	2	I
1	1	3	II
1	2	2	II
1	2	3	II
1	3	3	II
2	2	3	II
2	3	3	III
2	2	4	III
2	3	4	III
2	4	4	III

3	3	4	III
3	4	4	IV
3	3	5	IV
3	4	5	IV
3	5	5	IV
4	4	5	IV
4	5	5	V
4	4	6	V
4	5	6	V
4	6	6	V
5	5	6	V
5	6	6	VI
6	6	6	VI

- If the three pieces are at different grade levels more than two levels apart, the Declared Summary Grade Level would be the average of the three levels rounded to the closest whole number, with a x.5 rounded up.
- For ensembles participating in *Traditional*, the Declared Summary Grade Level is also included on the PMEA Award Plaque.
- Directors also declare on this form their preferred rating terminology for the PMEA Award Plaque or Certificate (where a rating is issued) as described above.

J. ASSESSMENT FORMS

- The PMEA *Assessment Forms* for all MPA contexts updated for 2025 reflect current assessment practices. Forms are available within the MPA area of the PMEA website under ‘Information for Participants’/’Choral MPA’s’. Directors are urged to use these assessment forms as classroom tools.

K. ADJUDICATORS

- Hosts contract three adjudicators for a *Choral MPA*.

L. COMMUNICATING WITH THE HOST PRIOR TO THE MPA

- All directors, especially those participating for the first time, are urged to be proactive in communicating with the Host in advance to confirm the final arrangements involved, including the following:
 - The final schedule of warm-up and performance times
 - Instructions concerning bus parking and where to enter the building
 - Stage set-up, including location of the piano and any other instruments or equipment used
 - Percussion or other instruments to be provided for accompaniment (i.e. drum set, bongos, amplifier)
 - A list of adjudicators
 - How and when adjudicator recordings can be accessed
 - Plans to watch other performances if possible

M. TO SUBMIT AT THE ON-SITE CHECK-IN

- Directors are to submit three manila envelopes (10x13 recommended), one for each adjudicator, labeled with the school’s name, ensemble name and Adjudicator #1, #2 or #3.

- Each envelope must contain a copy of the music for each of the three Prepared Pieces with the measures numbered if not already numbered by the publisher.
- The music must be originals unless the piece is out of print or in the public domain (i.e. CPDL). Copies may then be made, but only with written permission of the publisher provided. If copies are made, pages should be two-sided and taped rather than stapled.
- Directors are recommended to order any additional music needed well in advance to permit enough time to receive them from the publishers or for obtaining permission to make copies if the chosen piece is out of print.
- Music does not need to be provided for a warm-up piece or other warm-up materials.

SECTION 2: CHORAL MPA'S - THE EVENT

A. CHECK-IN

- The director must first check in at the designated group entrance to confirm that the ensemble has arrived, submit the three envelopes containing music for the adjudicators, and confirm where the students are to first proceed, usually to a *Holding Area*.

B. HOLDING AREA

- The *Holding Area* is a space to store coats and personal belongings. No singing or playing instruments is permitted. Students or parent volunteers normally monitor this area throughout the MPA.
- Most ensembles arrive wearing their concert attire. Hosts are not required to provide locker room access or dressing rooms, often not possible during the school day.
- The ensemble normally stays in the holding area until proceeding to the *Warm-Up Area*.
- If time permits prior to the scheduled warm-up, directors may have their students watch another ensemble perform. Directors have relayed that watching another group is valuable in and of itself and often lowers the performance anxiety of their own students.

C. WARM-UP AREA

- The formal *Warm-Up Area* is normally a large ensemble room with a recently tuned piano and enough chairs to seat all the students in each ensemble.
- The length of the warm-up time slot is 30 minutes.

D. AUDITORIUM STAGE

- The auditorium stage is where the formal assessment of the three Prepared Pieces takes place. The length of the performance time slot in the auditorium will be 30 minutes. This time frame includes entrance, set-up, optional warm-up, performing the Prepared Pieces, and exit.

- Hosts are strongly recommended to use choral risers with enough units to accommodate the largest participating ensembles. Hosts are permitted to use platform risers if necessary but must notify participating directors in advance.
- The stage is to be equipped with a conductor’s podium and a piano. Directors have the option to use a conductor’s podium. Hosts must ensure that the piano has been recently tuned.
- Ensembles are responsible to provide their own additional instruments used for accompaniment, such as percussion and/or electronics, and are responsible for moving them between the areas involved in the MPA. While most directors prefer to use their own equipment, instruments that their students are accustomed to using and hearing, they may contact the host about possibly providing some of the instruments and equipment if available. Directors often appreciate not having to worry about transporting percussion instruments such as a drum set or congas on a school bus.
- In addition to the adjudicators, the only audience would be the ensemble’s chaperones, students from other ensembles, or students from the host’s ensembles. The audience is permitted to clap after each piece.

E. WARM -UP

- Directors have the option to perform a warm-up piece or a vocal exercise sequence
- The total on-stage warm-up should be completed within three minutes.
- The performance of the warm-up is not assessed.
- Music or information about the warm-up music does not need to be provided.

F. PERFORMING THE PREPARED PIECES

- After the announcer introduces the ensemble, director, pieces, and adjudicators, the director may conduct the first piece.
- After each piece is finished, step off the podium and/or off to the side and wait until signaled by the center adjudicator to proceed.
- A multi-movement or multi-section piece can be conducted normally with no need to wait for adjudicators between movements.

G. HOW THE ADJUDICATORS USE THE ASSESSMENT FORMS

- The adjudicators assess the overall performance and assign a score from 1-15 for each of five Evaluation Areas: Tone, Pitch/Intonation, Rhythm, Technique and Expression, according to the following rubric and descriptors:

SCORE	RATING	PMEA DESCRIPTOR	LETTER GRADE	APPROX. PSSA EQUIVALENT
13-15	I	Superior	A+	Outstanding
10-12	II	Excellent	A	Advanced
7-9	III	Good	B	Proficient
4-6	IV	Fair	C	Basic
1-3	V	Unprepared	U	Below Basic

- The three-point range within the scoring for each evaluation area provides adjudicators with considerable flexibility in conveying their assessment within a given rating. Adjudicators decide which ‘third’-- lower, middle or upper --- within the three-point scoring range best reflects that determination within each Evaluation Area. For example, within the performance level of ‘II’, 10 is the lower number, 11 is the middle number, and 12 is the upper number.

UPPER NUMBER – an upper number reflects that many of the descriptors are displayed with a distinction that leads towards the descriptors of the next higher rating.

MIDDLE NUMBER – a middle number reflects when the performance typically displays most of the attributes of the given rating itself without enough distinction to lead in the direction of the next lower or higher rating.

LOW NUMBER– a low number provides a bridge between the next lower rating and the middle of the given rating. While the performance reflects most if not all of the descriptors involved, it has areas of concern in many of the components that reflect more of the descriptors of the next lower level.

- The scores for each of the five Evaluation Areas are then added together with the resulting Total Score generating the corresponding Final Rating as the cumulative assessment of the overall performance.
- The lowest Total Score within each Rating Level was calculated as the lowest possible summary of the five Evaluation areas as follows:

RATING LEVEL	E.A. #1	E.A. #2	E.A. #3	E.A. #4	E.A. #5	LOWEST TOTAL SCORE
Lowest I (13-15)	13	13	13	12	12	63
Lowest II (10-12)	10	10	10	9	9	48
Lowest III (7-9)	7	7	7	6	6	33
Lowest IV (4-6)	4	4	4	3	3	18
Lowest V (1-3)	1	1	1	1	1	5

- The scoring ranges indicated below within the Total Score can also be divided into ‘thirds’—lower (-), middle or upper (+) ---to best reflect achievement within the summary performance assessment.

FINAL RATING	TOTAL SCORE to FINAL RATING with DESCRIPTORS
Convert the Total Score to the Final Rating according to the table on the right using the Roman numeral only. Do not include a <u>-</u> or a <u>+</u>	63-75 I A+ (63-66 I- 67-71 I 72-75 I+) Superior Outstanding
	48-62 II A (48-52 II- 53-57 II 58-62 II+) Excellent Advanced
	33-47 III B (33-37 III- 38-42 III 43-47 III+) Good Proficient
	18-32 IV C (18-22 IV- 23-27 IV 28-32 IV+) Fair Basic
	5-17 V U <u>Unprepared Below Basic</u>

- Additional feedback is available using pluses ‘+’, ‘blanks’, or minuses ‘-’ to quickly indicate positive and negative aspects of the performance among ‘Specific Aspects’ within each Evaluation Area.

EVALUATION AREA SPECIFIC ASPECTS	
+	Area of strength; Noticeably strong within rating
Blank	Commensurate to rating
-	Area of concern; Noticeably needing attention within rating

- An area listing 'Other Factors' is included in the lower left corner of the assessment form. Feedback is also provided through pluses and minuses. This evaluation is not scored or part of the Final Rating. Some space is available to the right of the table for comments.

OTHER FACTORS (+, Blank or -) (Not scored; does not affect Final Rating)	
	Comportment
	Choice of Repertoire
	Conducting/Response to Conducting

- A large space is available on the front of the form for written comments that provide additional input that is clear, focused and concise. Comments should briefly identify strengths and areas that need to be addressed along with recommended 'next steps'. Space is available on the back of each form as an option for additional comments. For large ensembles, that space is divided to permit specific comments for each of the Prepared Pieces.

H. DETERMINING THE FINAL MPA RATING

The *Final MPA Rating* earned from the performance of the three Prepared Pieces is determined by combining the Final Ratings from the three adjudicators according to the following table:

DETERMINE THE FINAL MPA RATING BY COMBINING THE THREE RATINGS					
RATINGS FROM THE THREE ADJUDICATORS	I, I, I	I, II, II	I, III, III	I, IV, IV	I, V, V
	I, I, II	I, II, III	I, III, IV	I, IV, V	II, V, V
	I, I, III	I, II, IV	I, III, V	II, IV, IV	III, V, V
	I, I, IV	I, II, V	II, III, III	II, IV, V	IV, V, V
	I, I, V	II, II, II	II, III, IV	III, IV, IV	V, V, V
		II, II, III	II, III, V	III, IV, V	
		II, II, IV	III, III, III	IV, IV, IV	
		II, II, V	III, III, IV	IV, IV, V	
			III, III, V		
	FINAL MPA RATING	I	II	III	IV

FINAL RATING	PMEA DESCRIPTOR	LETTER GRADE	APPROX. PSSA EQUIVALENT
I	Superior	A+	Outstanding
II	Excellent	A	Advanced
III	Good	B	Proficient
IV	Fair	C	Basic
V	Unprepared	U	Below Basic

I. CLINIC

- Immediately following the performance of the Prepared Pieces, one of the adjudicators will provide a brief clinic on stage using any time remaining in the 30-minute slot to offer immediate feedback.
- The goal is to personalize the assessment experience by enabling communication directly from an adjudicator, analogous to the in-person communication the sight-reading adjudicator has with bands and orchestras and the direct verbal input provided by the adjudicator for soloists and small ensembles.

J. MPA RESULTS AND MATERIALS RETURNED FROM THE HOST

- The following items will be returned to each director before the ensemble departs:
 - [Choral MPA Rating Summary Form](#)
 - Three *Choral Assessment Forms*, one from each adjudicator
 - All the music for the Prepared Pieces provided for the adjudicators
- The host will provide information concerning how and when to access the audio recordings from the adjudicators.

K. AFTER THE MPA

- Directors are recommended to consider the following actions after the MPA:
 - Thank the administrator who granted permission for the ensemble to participate, any colleagues who assisted, and any parent volunteer chaperones for their support
 - Use the adjudicator recordings and assessment forms as educational classroom tools to enhance the overall experience for the students
 - Email the host expressing appreciation for hosting while also providing positive feedback and constructive suggestions
 - Email to the MPA Coordinator with feedback from the overall experience along with constructive suggestions concerning any aspect so that the 'system' can continue to evolve to improve the educational experience for all involved
 - For those ensembles participating in the *Traditional* performance context, consider the option to download the [Medal Order Form](#) and order medals for your students

L. DIRECTORS AS MEMBERS OF THE PMEA MPA COMMITTEE

- The annual meeting of the *PMEA Music Performance Assessment Committee* is held at the PMEA In-Service Conference. Participating directors and all interested members are encouraged to attend, contribute to the dialogue, and ask questions.
- While the meeting is informal, this forum includes reflecting on the current season along with discussing possible 'next steps'. This meeting has been an invaluable opportunity to consider options, determine priorities, and exchange ideas within dialogue not possible within individual communications.

To newly interested Directors----I hope that this *Guide* provides the information needed to successfully participate in a *Choral MPA* sponsored by the PMEA Music Performance Assessment program.

To experienced participating Directors----I hope that this *Guide* serves as a helpful reference to refresh memories, introduce updates for the upcoming season, and answer new questions about any aspect of participate in a *PMEA MPA*.

Contact the MPA Coordinator with any questions.