

Basic Barbershop Interpretation

These rules are your first pass when planning a song - go through and highlight each element so it is not overlooked. But remember, rules are made to be broken...

9 Rules of Thumb

#1 End of Phrase Chord Progressions

- hold the 2nd last chord! (except where #7 applies)

#2 Twiddles (One Part Moves Alone)

- bring out the sparkle

#3 Duets

- make sure each half is beautiful & musically balances the other half

#4 One Part Holds (Hangers, Echoes)

- maintain strength & spin on holding part
- ensure moving parts enhance the phrase message

#5 Bell Chords

- second note needs to anticipate or they will be late!
- all parts sing at equal volume so adjust to the lightest part

#6 Swipes, Waterfalls, Slides

- does it add to the musicality?
- how many parts are moving? How far does each go?
- lock the chord before you move it

#7 Repeating Patterns (verses/choruses)

- never do it quite the same twice! Vary pace, emphasis or dynamic/emotion.

#8 Changing Speed (Tempo Songs)

- No more than one ad lib and/or stomp section per song (not including intro and tag)

#9 Non-Lead Melody

- ensure the melody is always predominant to the ear

Utilise tags in your warmups to practice directing moves, experiment with interpretation choices (start by identifying the elements on paper) and to teach better hand watching. When learning a new song it can be fun to teach the tag first - they will want to sing the rest to get to it!

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Interpretation Choices

#1 Simplify

If you know your group will not perform an embellishment to your credit, **TAKE IT OUT!**

- Bell chords
- Swipes
- Key changes
- Words - simplify tongue twisters and consonant clusters but don't change the meaning overall. You can sometimes remove pickups for extra breaths. Change rhythms to make breath spots.

Other things you can take out if they present interpretive challenges include repeated cadences where there are just too many to find variations for, or where they are just slowing things down.

#2 Know Your Story

One way to make sure you are telling the story instead of mouthing words is to write out the words as prose (a paragraph) on a blank page. See where you would emphasise and breathe. See where you are tender, where chatty, where euphoric. Now look at the melodic line and match your highs with stronger dynamics, your lows with gentler delivery. Know where you start and where you will end, emotionally. If you can transition a few times in the middle, good for you ;-). In most ballads there's a section where you just need to move it along - subject matter is just more detail on the same topic, nothing new emotionally - don't be afraid to sing phrases with great movement even though it's a ballad!

#3 Shape Each Phrase

Emphasis - which is the important word for your story? Look for onomatopoeia and alliteration.

Breath - don't let a breath disturb the story. It must be meaningful or a natural resting place. Don't deny yourself air in the middle, near the climax! Plenty of air means a stronger peak and greater stamina in the tag.

Emotion - as stated above, dynamic planning should be a by-product of the storytelling. Use the generalisations of *Personal*, *Friendly* and *Exclamatory* to give overall levels rather than numbers.

**** Don't let emotion interfere with good singing! ****

#4 Get Inventive As Your Skillbase Rises

When your group starts to sing at a high B level start adding elements instead of removing them!