

## Fix-a-Flat

“You’re flat!” Seriously. When has saying that ever *really* helped?

“Big steps up, little steps down.” Or that? “Up” and “down” can be very abstract concepts for volunteer singers. Better to focus on where the whole steps and half steps are in a given scale/mode.

“Just raise your eyebrows.” Does that look work for all musical moods?

The overwhelming majority of intonation problems involve flattening. So...  
...how much of this is an *aural* issue, and how much is *technique*?

### Vowels:

- Unified vowels
- Space in back of mouth
- Don’t sing into chin or jaw, but more towards teeth.
- Don’t swallow vowel.
- Balance the vowel. Brighten vowels on lower pitches. Give vowels more depth for higher pitches.

### Consonants:

- Sing through the consonants, especially voiced (z, b, v, n)
- Consonants don’t simply break up the vowels. They can connect vowels.

### Rhythmic Intensity:

- Momentum. This is *not* about how fast or slow. It’s about direction and intent.
- Whole notes and half notes are not ambiguously long note values to be “held.” Don’t hold a whole note. Move through it.
- Sing on the balls of the feet, not the heels.
- Practice having the choir sing without conducting them. Empower the singers to be responsible for the tempo.
- Don’t “triplify” dotted rhythms.
- Balance. In a busy piece feel the “bigger” beats. In a slower piece, feel the “smaller” beats.

### **Volume:**

- Singing louder or softer than appropriate can drive the pitch, especially when excessive pressure is placed on the throat/chords/etc.
- Sing softly enough to hear other parts. Sing out enough for others to hear you.
- Balance. A choir can sound out of tune just by volume being unbalanced.

### **The Piano:**

- A well-tempered instrument can't adjust chord-to-chord the way a voice can.
- Sing a cappella as much as possible. Try singing a 4-measure passage unaccompanied.
- Leaning too much on piano not only weakens pitch independence, but rhythmic independence as well.

### **Harmony:**

- Understanding where the root is, and where "my note" is in relation to the root.
- Octaves, 4ths, and 5ths need to lock.
- Where are the tendency tones, and half step relationships? (Fa-Mi and Ti-Do)
- When drilling notes, don't ignore the sopranos and basses. We often spend a lot of time picking on the altos and tenors.

### **Posture:**

- How much sitting do you do in rehearsal? How does the sitting look?
- Tall, not tense. Buoyant.
- How are the faces? Vibrant? Droopy?

### **Odds 'n' Ends:**

- If the altos, tenors, and basses all sound flat, then maybe...
- Warm-ups. We do a lot of 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1 vocalizing. These reinforce the carrying up of chest register. Spend more time in warm ups that bring the head voice down. (Sirens, howls, puppy dogs, descending "loo.")
- Don't underestimate warm-ups in the morning. But be careful not to "overwarm" in the afternoon/evening.
- POSITIVE ATTITUDE and POSITIVE FEEDBACK whenever possible!