THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF SINGING

2026-2027 NATIONAL STUDENT AUDITIONS

NSA DIVISION REGULATIONS
NSA DIVISION RUBRICS
NSA SAMPLE COMMENTS

Clearer expectations.
Better resources.
Stronger auditions.

The National Student Auditions are evolving to better serve today's singers, teachers, adjudicators, and auditions teams while preserving the educational excellence and integrity that define the program. Discover a clearer, more consistent, and more accessible NSA experience through refreshed regulations, practical resources, and the OneAudition initiative.

National Student Auditions
National Association of Teachers of Singing

NSA REGULATIONS - ALL CATEGORIES

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

AGE LIMIT	A singer's age category is determined by their age on September 1, the first day of the NSA audition cycle, and remains the same throughout that cycle. An audition cycle begins in September and finishes in July. • Students may not enter a category if they exceed its maximum age limit. • Students enrolled in or holding a music degree who are older than the age limit for their level of study may enter that category for comments only or enter an eligible Non-Traditional Student category (non-advancing) according to requirements. • Students whose age qualifies them for a higher category than their current level of study may choose to enter the higher age-appropriate category competitively. • NSA categories have no minimum age requirements except the Avocational Adults Category, Non-Traditional Adults Category, and the Hall Johnson Spirituals Competition.
ARRANGEMENTS	An arrangement is an adaptation of an existing song or composition. It may include a new accompaniment, changes to melody, rhythm, harmony, or form, or even a different musical style. Arrangements that omit verses of repertoire regardless of publication are not permitted. In the Hall Johnson Spirituals Competition and American Spirituals categories, settings of anonymous spirituals must credit the arranger. Arrangements obtained from unofficial sources, such as MuseScore, are not allowed.
AUDITIONING MEMBER TEACHERS	Eligible NATS member-teachers may compete in NSA auditions through their current teacher but may not self-enter. Those entering singers must also be available to adjudicate one category at the auditions.
CATEGORY	Categories are defined by voice type, age range, and length of study. • All Voices: Children 1, Youth 2, and Spiritual Categories • Treble Voices: Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Contralto, Countertenor Voices in Categories: 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 • TBB Voices: Tenor, Baritone, Bass Voices in Categories: 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14
CATEGORY NUMBERS	Children & Youth: 1 & 2 - All Voices. Unchanged voices sing in treble categories. For the remaining categories, odd numbered categories are for treble voices: • High School (HS) - 3 & 4 • Lower Post-HS: one–two years Post-HS - 5 & 6 • Upper Post-HS: three-five years Post-HS not in a grad program - 7 & 8 • Advanced: four+ years Post-HS and/or in graduate program - 9-10 • Avocational Adults: 11 & 12 • Non-Traditional Adults: 13 & 14

NSA REGULATIONS - ALL CATEGORIES, cont.

COMMENTS ONLY	Any singer may elect to enter a category auditioning for comments only and participate exclusively in a preliminary audition. Adjudicators will not score auditions entered for comments only.
LENGTH OF STUDY	Children, Youth, and High School categories are based on grade level, not years of study. Post-high school categories are based on a combination of age and the total years of voice study with any teacher, including private study, group lessons, college, university, or conservatory instruction. Any reasonable portion of a year will count as a year of study. • Lower Post-HS: Age 22 or younger; 1st–2nd year of post-high school voice study • Upper Post-HS: Age 25 or younger; 3rd–5th year of post-high school voice study and not enrolled in a graduate voice program • Advanced: Age 30 or younger; 4th year or higher of post-high school voice study after completing a bachelor's degree.
OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE IN REPERTOIRE	NATS encourages teachers and singers to select NSA repertoire that reflects its commitment to a welcoming and respectful community for participants and audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Teachers should carefully consider lyric content. To respect copyright, lyrics may not be altered unless a published clean version exists or permission has been obtained from the copyright holder.
REPERTOIRE CHANGES	Once the qualifying NSA event has concluded, there is no room for any alteration of the repertoire. Those singers who move on to the NSA YouTube rounds from the region auditions must put forward the very pieces that were submitted, vetted and approved by the chair of the region audition. Any deviation from performing the approved repertoire following the region level, even in part, will render a singer Ineligible to Advance to the next step of the NSA rounds.
REPERTOIRE LIMITATIONS	At the NATS Student Auditions, singers are adjudicated on their individual artistry, vocal technique, musicianship, and interpretation through the performance of solo repertoire. Accordingly, repertoire originally written for duets, trios, quartets, or larger ensembles in a production is not permitted. A limited exception is made for published solo editions approved by the copyright holder–authorized arrangements that preserve the complete original solo line while omitting only incidental chorus or ensemble passages. In these cases, the musical and dramatic integrity of the work remains unchanged, and the selection continues to function as a genuine solo performance.

National Student Auditions
National Association of Teachers of Singing

NSA CLASSICAL (CL) REGULATIONS

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

24/26/28 ITALIAN ART SONGS AND ARIAS	The repertoire found in the 24/26/28 Italian Art Songs and Arias collections may be counted as an aria or an art song in the high school (CL 3, CL 4) and lower classical categories (CL 5, CL 6). For the singers in the upper and advanced categories, these pieces may ONLY count as an art song, regardless of origin. Any repertoire found outside of these collections will be considered only as the composer intended as an art song OR aria.
ACCOMPANIMENT	A live collaborative pianist is required for in person CL auditions. A piano-only accompaniment track is allowed only for video auditions in CL.
ADDITIONAL AWARDS	Named and Sponsored NSA Awards are available to NSA's National Semifinalists and Finalists, who in their region's NSA event, enter the prescribed repertoire to be eligible for the significant sponsored award, prize, or scholarship.
AGE APPROPRIATE	Selections should be appropriate in technical difficulty, musical style, language, subject matter, and performance demands, allowing the singer to perform with musical accuracy, comprehension, and efficient vocal production. Teachers should carefully consider emotional content, staging, choreography, gestures, and physical interactions. Repertoire involving mature romantic relationships, sexuality, abuse, violence, addiction, suicide, or other adult themes is generally not appropriate for Children and Youth categories. Selections should reflect emotions, experiences, and performance expectations that the singer can communicate authentically and age-appropriately.
ARIA	An aria is a solo from an opera, oratorio, mass, cantata, zarzuela, operetta, or works titled "concert aria." Oxford Online definitions will be used for the purposes of NATS singer auditions. For example, Purcell's selections from the semi-operas and masques are considered songs.
ART SONG IN ENGLISH REQUIRMENT	English must be the original language set by the composer to meet the Art Song in English requirement. For singers in the International Region from countries where English is NOT the primary language, any requirement for an English-language art song may be fulfilled by an art song in any official language of their country.
CLASSICAL REPERTOIRE	In CL categories, the word "classical" refers to art songs and arias from the classical genre, not limited to the Classical period of Mozart and Haydn. No musical theatre, pop, gospel, soul, jazz, rhythm and blues, etc. may be entered in the Classical Category. Published classical arrangements of folk songs, spirituals, and traditional hymn tunes in English are widely accepted as a part of the classical genre; singers in classical categories may present one selection of this type to fulfill the Art Song in English requirement.

NSA CLASSICAL (CL) REGULATIONS, cont.

CONTRASTING SELECTIONS	Contrasting selections will vary in tempo, text, dramatic content, composer, character portrayed, vocal colors, and style of music. Two or more songs by the same composer is a violation of this regulation and renders the singing Ineligible to Advance. Substantial variety among selections should result in a higher preliminary audition score.
DOUBLE DIPPING	Singers entering multiple NSA categories (Classical, Commercial Music, Musical Theatre, and/or Spirituals) may NOT use the same selection in any other category including the American Negro Spirituals category nor Hall Johnson Category.
JUDICIOUS CUTS	Full, complete selections are required; however, judicious cuts in piano introductions, piano interludes, piano postludes as well as internal cuts within arias are allowed as is common professional performance practice. Cuts of verse or verses of selections are not allowed. In the case of strophic pieces, all verses should remain that are traditionally included.
MEMORIZATION	All repertoire must be performed from memory with the exception of Oratorio, Mass, Requiem, and Cantata Arias. Singers may hold legal copies of music scores for these types of arias as is traditional performance practice.
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE	All selections should be sung in original language or in a published translation that is recognized as an accepted standard in professional performance practice.
TRANSPOSITION	Transpositions that are available for purchase by a publishing company are permitted. Singers are expected to retain the composer's intended style of music and to convey the essence of the character portrayed in the larger work. Performances not fulfilling these requirements may result in lower scores from adjudicators. Octave displacement is a transposition.

National Student Auditions
National Association of Teachers of Singing

NSA AMERICAN NEGRO SPIRITUALS (AS) REGULATIONS

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

CLASSICAL STYLE	The word "classical" in this context refers to singing spirituals in the classical style with only mild deviations and interpolation to what is written in the music and without musical theatre, pop, gospel, contemporary Christian, soul, jazz, rhythm and blues expressions or vocal technique. See the NSA Spiritual Adjudicator Training Video for the differences between Spirituals and Gospel Songs and more details on performing Spirituals in NSA.
CONTRASTING SELECTIONS	Contrasting selections will vary in tempo, text, dramatic content, composer, character portrayed, vocal colors, and style of music. Two or more songs by the same composer is a violation of this regulation and renders the singing Ineligible to Advance. Substantial variety among selections should result in a higher preliminary audition score.
DICTION	Because of the idiomatic nature of the spiritual, diction restrictions will be relaxed. Standard English pronunciations may be observed, e.g., "de" or "duh" may be replaced with "the." For more advanced singers, the scholarly study of diction in spirituals is equivalent to studying the lyric diction of other languages.
JUDICIOUS CUTS	Piano introductions, piano interludes, piano music after the vocal solo is completed, and internal cuts of spiritual selections are allowed as in common performance practice. Cuts of a verse or verses of selections are not allowed. In the case of strophic pieces, all verses should remain that are traditionally included.
MEMORIZATION	All audition selections must be performed from memory.
SPIRITUALS	Arrangements in classical style of the North American Negro Spirituals by composers similar in style to the spirituals of Hall Johnson, R. Nathaniel Dett, Florence Price, Moses Hogan, Edward Boatner, Undine Smith Moore, James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson, Margaret Bonds and others listed on the AS Authorized Reperoire of the documents. The classical style excludes Gospel, Blues and Jazz music. See below for a link to more information available online..
SPIRITUALS IN ENGLISH	English must be the original language of the selection.
TRANSPOSITION	Copyright-compliant, purchased transpositions are allowed.

Singers must perform arrangements in classical style of the North American Negro Spirituals by these composers for AS Categories

- Edward Hammond Boatner
- Margaret Bonds
- Uzee Brown Jr.
- Lawrence Brown, arr
- Harry T. Burleigh
- John (Daniels) Carter
- Roland M. Carter
- R. Nathaniel Dett
- Adolphus Hailstork
- Jacqueline B. Hairston
- Robert A. Harris
- Roland Hays
- Lori C. Hicks
- Moses Hogan
- Hall Johnson
- John Rosamond Johnson
- James Weldon Johnson
- Betty Jackson King
- James C. Lee III
- Lena McLin
- Robert Owens
- Florence Price
- Evelyn Simpson-Curenton
- Undine Smith Moore
- William Grant Still
- Howard Swanson
- Clarence White
- John W. Work, III

NSA AMERICAN NEGRO SPIRITUALS (AS) REGULATIONS, cont.

Approved Repertoire Collections for Purchase

Alfred Music
- Album of Negro Spirituals (Low Voice) — Burleigh, Harry T., arr.
- The Spirituals of Harry T. Burleigh — Burleigh, Harry T., arr.

Amazon
- The Books of the American Negro Spirituals — Johnson, J. Rosamond and Brown, Lawrence, arrangers

Carl Fischer
- The Green Pastures Spirituals — Johnson, Hall, arr.
- The Hall Johnson Collection: Over 50 Classic Favorites for Voice and Piano — Johnson, Hall, arr.

ClarNan Editions
- 44 Art Songs and Spirituals — Price, Florence B., arr.; Heard, Richard, ed.

Classical Vocal Reprints
- 40 Negro Spirituals — White, Clarence, arr.
- Cantata — Carter, John (Daniels)
- Mary and Her Baby Chile — Hairston, Jacqueline B., arr.
- My Favorite Spirituals — Hayes, Roland, arr.
- Six Negro Spirituals for Bass — Owens, Robert, arr.

Classical Vocal Reprints, continued
- Songs and Spirituals by Jacqueline Hairston — Hairston, Jacqueline B., arr.
- Spirituals: Five Negro Songs — Brown, Lawrence, arr.
- Sweetest Sound I Ever Heard: Spiritual Art Songs for High Voice and Piano — Carter, Roland Marvin, composer/arr.

Edward B. Marks Music Company
- Album of Negro Spirituals — Johnson, John Rosamond, arr.

Hal Leonard
- 25 Spirituals Arranged by Harry T. Burleigh — Burleigh, Harry T., arr.
- 30 Spirituals (for High Voice and Piano) — Johnson, Hall, arr.
- The Deep River Collection — Hogan, Moses, arr.

Handy Bros. Music Company
- Twelve Negro Spirituals — Still, William Grant, arr.

Hildegard Publishing Company
- Art Songs and Spirituals by African-American Women Composers — Taylor, Vivian, ed.

J.W. Pepper
- Redeemed!: A Set of African American Spirituals for Medium-High Voice and Piano — Brown, Jr., Uzee, arr.
- Tryin' To Make Heaven My Home — Brown, Jr., Uzee, arr.

Kjos Publisher/Presto Music
- Songs for Voice & Piano: Medium High Voice — McLin, Lena, arr.

Mar-Vel Music
- God Is God!: Six Negro Spirituals for Voice and Piano — Carter, Roland M.; Betty Jackson King; Wendell Whalum, arrs.

Sheet Music Plus
- Album of Negro Spirituals (Low Voice) — Burleigh, Harry T., arr.
- In His Hand: Seven Spirituals for Voice and Piano — Bonds, Margaret, arr.
- Redeemed!: A Set of African American Spirituals for Medium-High Voice and Piano — Brown, Jr., Uzee, arr.

Videmus
- The New Negro Spirituals Collection — Patterson, Willis C., ed.

Approved Solo Repertoire

Boatner, Edward Hammond
- A Heritage of Spirituals. Galaxy Music Corporation.

Boatner, Edward Hammond
- The Story of the Spirituals: 30 Spirituals and Their Origins: Voice and Piano/Guitar. McAfee Music, 1973. Assigned to Alfred 1985. Only Library copies available

Brown, Lawrence
- Six Negro Folk Songs. Associated Music Publishers, Inc.
- Negro Folk Songs. London: Schott, 1930. 5 songs as sung by Paul Robeson.

- Fisher, William Arms

Seventy Negro Spirituals; For Low Voice or High Voice. Oliver Ditson Company, Boston, 1926.

Hayes, Roland
- Songs. McClelland and Stewart Limited.

Jessye, Eva.
- My Spirituals. New York: Robbins-Engel, 1927.

Spirituals not found in the Approved Spirituals Repertoire online may be vetted and approved by contacting one of the following NATS members: Alexis Davis-Hazell adavishazell@ua.edu, Barbara Hill-Moore bhmoore@mail.smu.edu, Everett McCorvey everett.mccorvey@uky.edu, Marcia Porter MPorter@admin.fsu.edu

National Student Auditions
National Association of Teachers of Singing

NSA CLASSICAL AUDITIONS RUBRIC

Each singer's performance is adjudicated in comparison to the following standards as applied to the category of entry.

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
TONE • Resonance and timbre are appropriate to the style with balanced chiaroscuro and ring throughout range. • Transitions through passaggi are smooth and efficient. • Onsets and offsets are clean, clear, and balanced allowing for uniform vibrancy and clarity. • Dynamic flexibility is present. • The singer engages the ability to make subtle changes in timbre appropriate to the style and character of the selection.	The singer is beginning to develop vocal resonance and balanced chiaroscuro timbre. Onsets and offsets delay or press the tone and cause extra noise or air. Transitions through passaggi are difficult or uneven. Dynamic flexibility is missing in much of the performance. Vocal colors do not enhance the style and character of the selection.	The singer is advancing in resonance and balanced chiaroscuro through some of the range. Onsets and offsets are mostly immediate, but some pressing or breathiness is present. Passaggi transitions are inconsistent. Dynamic flexibility is evident much of the time. Vocal colors mostly enhance the style and character of the selection.	The singer is mastering resonance. A balanced chiaroscuro tone rings throughout range. Onsets and offsets are immediate and promote clarity. Passaggi transitions are smooth and efficient. Dynamic flexibility is consistently evident in the performance. Vocal colors consistently enhance the style and character of the selection.
BREATH & ALIGNMENT • Inhalation is easy, full, silent, and efficient. • Exhalation provides stability, support, vibrancy, buoyancy, loft, and vocal energy. • The alignment, coordination, and release of the head, neck, larynx, jaw, ribs, back, abdomen, legs, and feet assist a dynamic engagement of the vocal instrument.	The singer is developing appropriate respiration. Inhalation is often noisy or insufficient. During exhalation, the singer tenses or collapses requiring extra breaths to complete phrases. Buoyancy and loft are inconsistent. The lack of coordination and alignment of the body hinders a dynamic engagement of the vocal instrument.	The singer is advancing toward appropriate respiration. Inhalation is mostly easy and sufficient. Exhalation often provides stability, support, and vocal energy with some collapsing and tension. Buoyancy and loft are often present. The coordination and alignment of the body are mostly assisting a dynamic engagement of the vocal instrument.	The singer is mastering respiration. Inhalation is easy and sufficient. Exhalation provides support, balanced stability, and energy. Buoyancy and loft are consistently present. The coordination and alignment of the body consistently assists a dynamic engagement of the vocal instrument.
TEXT & DICTION • Languages are sung with accurate pronunciation and effective articulation with idiomatic inflection beyond basic phonetics. • The singer displays a thorough understanding in communicating the text. • Phrasing and flow respect the nuance of each language.	The singer is developing some language proficiency but is often inaccurate in pronunciation and articulation. Idiomatic characteristics of the language are not present. The meaning of the text is ambiguous and poorly communicated. Phrasing and flow do not respect the nuance of each language.	The singer is advancing in language proficiency with accurate pronunciation and articulation. Idiomatic characteristics of the language are inconsistently present. The singer often communicates the meaning of the text. Phrasing and flow respect the nuance of each language inconsistently.	The singer is mastering languages with accurate pronunciation and effective articulation. Idiomatic inflection beyond basic phonetics is consistently present. The singer understands and communicates the meaning of the text. Phrasing and flow consistently respect the nuance of each language.

NSA CLASSICAL AUDITIONS RUBRIC, cont.

Each singer's performance is adjudicated in comparison to the following standards as applied to the category of entry.

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
MUSICIANSHIP • Pitches and rhythms are accurate. • Tuning is accurate throughout range. • The markings of the composer, editor, or arranger are observed and present in the performance. • Selections are accurately performed from memory.	The singer's musicianship is beginning to develop with many accurate pitches and rhythms. Some errors are present. Tuning is often problematic. The markings in the score are rarely observed or present in the performance. Memorization is incomplete.	The singer's musicianship is advancing with pitch and rhythmic accuracy most of the time. Tuning is mostly accurate and complete with some errors. Many of the markings in the score are observed and present in the performance. Memorization is mostly complete.	The singer's musicianship is refined. All pitches and rhythms are accurate. Tuning is consistently accurate. The markings in thescore are observedand present in the performance. Memorization is accurate.
ARTISTRY • The performance synthesizes vocal and physical communication to embody and express the character and story/poetry. • The performance embodies clear musical intent and embraces the uniqueness of the singer. • The listeners are engaged in a believable and fulfilling aesthetic performance.	The singer's performance does not embody a thorough understanding of the text and music. Physical, musical, and vocal choices are not contributing to effective communication. The performance is self-conscious and insecure.	Physical, musical, and vocal choices coordinate to create believable moments. An authenticity that embraces the uniqueness of the singer is emerging. The singer is inconsistent in engaging the listeners in a fulfilling aesthetic performance.	Physical, musical, and vocal choices allow the singer to communicate effectively. An authentic performance embraces the uniqueness of the singer. The singer consistently engages the listeners in a believable and fulfilling aesthetic performance.
ENSEMBLE (comments only) • The singer and pianist coordinate their efforts toward the same artistic goals in the performance.	The singer and pianist seem unsynchronized. The artistic goals of the performance were unclear.	The singer and pianist are often coordinated in their effortstoward the same artistic goals in the performance.	The singer and pianist are consistently coordinated in their efforts toward the same artistic goals in the entire performance.

National Student Auditions
National Association of Teachers of Singing

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

NSA CHILDREN & YOUTH RUBRIC

Each singer's performance is adjudicated in comparison to the following standards as applied to the category of entry.

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
VOCAL EASE & COMFORT • Vocal freedom in singing • Lack of strain in singing • Accessing a vocal range appropriate for the age/ physical maturity of the singer • Demonstrating an emerging awareness of healthy vocal coordination	The singer demonstrates emerging vocal freedom with occasional tension or inconsistent tone. Range and vocal choices are generally appropriate for their age and stage of development.	The singer performs with increasing vocal freedom, healthy tone, and age-appropriate range. Breath and vocal coordination are becoming more consistent.	The singer performs with natural vocal ease, consistent healthy production, and confident use of an age-appropriate range without unnecessary tension.
PITCH & RHYTHM • General pitch matching • Tempo awareness • Rhythmic consistency • Timing vocal entrances • Ability to continue with recovery skills • Musicianship skills are developing	The singer demonstrates basic pitch and rhythmic accuracy with occasional errors but is able to recover and continue.	The singer performs with generally accurate pitch, steady rhythm, and growing musical independence.	The singer performs with consistently accurate pitch, rhythmic security, musical confidence, and stylistic awareness appropriate to the repertoire..
TEXT COMMUNICATION • Clarity and understanding of lyrics is present at a level appropriate to the student's age NOTE: Missing teeth, retainers, teeth-straightening trays, braces, etc.—will all alter some pronunciations/ articulations.	The singer communicates the text with emerging clarity and understanding appropriate for their age. Diction supports basic communication.	The singer clearly communicates the text with growing expressive intent and understandable diction.	The singer communicates the text with confidence, clarity, and genuine connection while remaining age appropriate.
EXPRESSIVE ENGAGEMENT • Willingness to communicate and connect to the song's music and lyrics/ text in age-appropriate expression.	The singer shows a willingness to communicate the character or mood of the song with emerging expressive choices.	The singer makes thoughtful expressive choices that support the text and demonstrates increasing confidence in performance.	The singer presents an engaging, sincere performance that communicates the story naturally and authentically for their age.

NSA CHILDREN & YOUTH RUBRIC, cont.

Each singer's performance is adjudicated in comparison to the following standards as applied to the category of entry.

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
PERFORMANCE READINESS • Secure memorization • Independence in performance • Ability to complete selections with continuity • Foundational performance skills	The singer is generally prepared, demonstrates memorization, and completes the performance with occasional lapses in confidence or independence.	The singer performs from memory with growing confidence, independence, and stage awareness.	The singer performs with confidence, secure memorization, poise, and independence throughout the performance.
STYLE OF MUSIC • Age-appropriate levels of differences in the audition's performance as appropriate to the category— whether CL, MT, or CM music. NOTE: See genre-specific rubric as needed for further details	The singer demonstrates emerging awareness of the stylistic expectations of the selected genre.	The singer performs with increasing understanding of the style, character, and performance practices appropriate to the genre.	The singer demonstrates a confident, age-appropriate understanding of the musical style and performs with stylistic consistency.

National Student Auditions
National Association of Teachers of Singing

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

NSA CLASSICAL SAMPLE COMMENTS

Adjudicators can utilize these suggestions to guide them in making useful comments for each singer during their session.

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
TONE • Resonance and timbre are appropriate to the style with balanced chiaroscuro and ring throughout range. • Transitions through passaggi are smooth and efficient. • Onsets and offsets are clean, clear, and balanced allowing for uniform vibrancy and clarity. • Dynamic flexibility is present. • The singer engages the ability to make subtle changes in timbre appropriate to the style and character of the selection.	• You have the beginnings of a rich, colorful voice. • Your sound must be a vehicle for expression of text. • The [u] vowel is overly modified to my ear. • Allow your sound to carry more naturally. • The lower register could resonate more freely.	• More pressure may not be the answer in order to tune that pitch - you may have to make a space, lip, or vowel change. • I would love to hear more clean/clear/unmodified vowels in your lower and middle voice. • If you modify too much it then becomes about your sound.	• Balanced resonance from top to bottom. • Beautiful tone. I want to listen to you and the words. • Excellent tonal consistency and ring. • Your tone communicates with ease and beauty.
BREATH & ALIGNMENT • Inhalation is easy, full, silent, and efficient. • Exhalation provides stability, support, vibrancy, buoyancy, loft, and vocal energy. • The alignment, coordination, and release of the head, neck, larynx, jaw, ribs, back, abdomen, legs, and feet assist a dynamic engagement of the vocal instrument.	• Take time for breath. • Continue to work for legato where your breath is more continuous. • Breath management will strengthen longer phrases.	• I see you taking a deep inhalation most of the time, but I wonder if you could take more time with the inhalation. • Take time for relaxed inhalation, almost as if you choreograph the breath into the interlude before it's time to sing.	• When you take your time, you are better able to prepare the pharynx and release the larynx for a warmer, more opulent tone that we are hearing in your singing today..
TEXT & DICTION • Languages are sung with accurate pronunciation and effective articulation with idiomatic inflection beyond basic phonetics. • The singer displays a thorough understanding in communicating the text. • Phrasing and flow respect the nuance of each language.	• Final schwas should not be nasal. • Some syllables are indistinct. • Continue refining language accuracy.	• Diction is generally clear and idiomatic in inflection, although I would like to hear stronger consonants in the German diction. • There are times in this piece where your articulation/enunciation seems very natural, in spite of the pitches being well outside the range of). I think this is really important. Other times it seems like you are over shaping or over enunciating.	• I appreciate the attention you are paying to make sure that the audience gets the text, but in these moments, we lose some of the naturalness/sense of honesty because the articulation chops us the sound. • Every word contributed to the storytelling.

NSA CLASSICAL SAMPLE COMMENTS, cont.

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
MUSICIANSHIP • Pitches and rhythms are accurate. • Tuning is accurate throughout range. • The markings of the composer, editor, or arranger are observed and present in the performance. • Selections are accurately performed from memory.	• Continue refining pitch accuracy. • Observe more details in the score. • Memorization needs greater security.	• Fine legato singing and expressive phrasing. • I appreciate that you explore all aspects of your vocal color - from soft, intimate tones to full, dramatic tones. • Musical preparation is evident. • Continue refining stylistic details.	• A mature technique supported artistic freedom. • Well prepared with stylish, expressive ornaments that show the colors of your delightful voice. • There is wonderful flexibility to your instrument as demonstrated in the Handel aria – a wonderful aria for you.
ARTISTRY • The performance synthesizes vocal and physical communication to embody and express the character and story/poetry. • The performance embodies clear musical intent and embraces the uniqueness of the singer. • The listeners are engaged in a believable and fulfilling aesthetic performance.	• Overall, breath management was secure enough to see phrases through with musical intent. • A more economical plan for breath management would serve some of the longer lines better.	• Your performance is energetic. would like to see the physicality match your voice. • Your performance is engaging. • Continue deepening your dramatic choices. • Match your physical expression to your vocal storytelling.	• The Mozart recitative was well paced and presented with a clear dramatic intent. The aria demonstrated fine legato lines and expressive phrasing of this aria. • The aria demonstrated fine legato lines and expressive phrasing despite the breakneck speed required of this aria.
ENSEMBLE (comments only) • The singer and pianist coordinate their efforts toward the same artistic goals in the performance	• Greater coordination with the collaborative pianist will strengthen the performance. • More attention to ensemble details will support your artistic goals.	• Consider responding more actively to musical details from the accompaniment. • The collaboration supports the performance effectively.	• Excellent collaboration with the accompaniment. • You demonstrate strong awareness of ensemble, timing, and communication to bring this tale to life.

National Student Auditions
National Association of Teachers of Singing
NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

AMERICAN NEGRO SPIRITUALS SAMPLE COMMENTS

Adjudicators can utilize these suggestions to guide them in making useful comments for each singer during their session.

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
TONE • Resonance and timbre are appropriate to the style with balanced chiaroscuro and ring throughout range. • Transitions through passaggi are smooth and efficient. • Onsets and offsets are clean, clear, and balanced allowing for uniform vibrancy and clarity. • Dynamic flexibility is present. • The singer engages the ability to make subtle changes in timbre appropriate to the style and character of the selection.	• You're using a vocal color that suited the style and the text. • While soft singing was largely under control, there is room to put more core into the piano dynamics for better continuity. • More ease and consistent release in the upper register would be an improvement.	• The voice has some promising flexibility, especially when warmth and lyricism are called for. • Registration was dealt with carefully, yet a smoother transition between registers would add to consistency.	• A warm and focused tone was evident in your performance, one that did justice to the emotional depth and expressive nature of the spiritual.
BREATH & ALIGNMENT • Inhalation is easy, full, silent, and efficient. • Exhalation provides stability, support, vibrancy, buoyancy, loft, and vocal energy. • The alignment, coordination, and release of the head, neck, larynx, jaw, ribs, back, abdomen, legs, and feet assist a dynamic engagement of the vocal instrument.	• Overall, breath management was secure enough to see phrases through with musical intent. • A more economical plan for breath management would serve some of the longer lines better.	• The technique is well-suited to the repertoire, if not for an occasional tension that gets in the way of free production. • The vocal line held up well, though support wavered slightly at the end of a phrase here and there.	• When you take your time, you are better able to prepare the pharynx and release the larynx for a warmer, more opulent tone that we are hearing in your singing today..
TEXT & DICTION • Languages are sung with accurate pronunciation and effective articulation with idiomatic inflection beyond basic phonetics. • The singer displays a thorough understanding in communicating the text. • Phrasing and flow respect the nuance of each language.	• Final schwas should not be nasal. • Some syllables are indistinct. • Continue refining language accuracy.	• Diction is generally clear and idiomatic in inflection, although I would like to hear stronger consonants in the German diction. • There are times in this piece where your articulation/ enunciation seems very natural, in spite of the pitches being well outside the range of). I think this is really important. Other times it seems like you are over shaping or over enunciating.	I appreciate the attention you are paying to make sure that the audience gets the text, but in these moments, we lose some of the naturalness/sense of honesty because the articulation chops us the sound. Every word contributed to the storytelling.

AMERICAN NEGRO SPIRITUALS SAMPLE COMMENTS

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
MUSICIANSHIP • Pitches and rhythms are accurate. • Tuning is accurate throughout range. • The markings of the composer, editor, or arranger are observed and present in the performance. • Selections are accurately performed from memory.	• The repetition in the spiritual was given enough of a varied touch to hold interest. • ·A better balance between classical vocal production and the idiom of the tradition would be an asset.	• There was a steady pulse to your singing which gave the piece's more expressive moments a firm underpinning. • Your dynamic choices were thoughtful and they supported the arc of the piece.	• Dynamic shading was used to good effect in illuminating the narrative and emotional contour of the work. • There are places where a more deliberate inflection would heighten the contrast. In the climactic moments, a more text-driven immediacy would serve the performance well.
ARTISTRY • The performance synthesizes vocal and physical communication to embody and express the character and story/poetry. • The performance embodies clear musical intent and embraces the uniqueness of the singer. • The listeners are engaged in a believable and fulfilling aesthetic performance.	• A deeper study of the cultural context would add to the stylistic authenticity • For the most part, your interpretation had the kind of simplicity and directness one expects from the genre, while still being expressively sincere.	• The phrasing was handled with care, so as to let the melody come across in a natural and expressive manner. • One can see a sincere engagement with the material and an understanding of its language that is still in development. Some technical polish, more consistent management of the breath and clearer text work would do much to enhance the vocal freedom and impact of the performance.	• One could hear an awareness of the communal spirit and call-and-response energy of the genre in your interpretation. • There was a clear sense of the spiritual's mix of lament, hope and resilience in what you did. You handled the emotional side of things with the proper seriousness, eschewing any excess sentimentality.
ENSEMBLE (comments only) • The singer and pianist coordinate their efforts toward the same artistic goals in the performance	• Coordination with the accompaniment was secure for the most part; while there were now and then some hesitations in the transitions, it never undermined the overall effect.	• Consider responding more actively to musical details from the accompaniment.	• Excellent collaboration with the accompaniment. • You demonstrate strong awareness of ensemble, timing, and communication to bring this tale to life.

National Student Auditions Best Practices for Thoughtful and Educational Adjudication

As adjudicators, we have the privilege of making a singers audition experience educational, encouraging, and fair. The first goal of the adjudicator it to provide meaningful feedback that helps singers and teachers continue their artistic journey. The second goal is assigning a score that matches the material written in the comments.

Effective adjudication reflects the values of NATS: fairness, consistency, respect, and a genuine commitment to teaching. Adjudicators should evaluate singers impartially, provide comments that are clear and constructive, score performances in alignment with the appropriate NATS rubric, and understand the procedures for the category they are adjudicating.

Before You Begin

Take a moment to ensure you are prepared to serve the singers in your room.

- Am I familiar with the appropriate rubric and scoring standards?
- Am I prepared to evaluate singers according to the level of this category rather than against my personal preferences?
- Do I know the stylistic expectations and vocabulary for this repertoire?
- Do I understand how this category is evaluated?
- Have I completed any required training or viewed any required videos?

The Spirit of Great Adjudication

- Appreciative by acknowledging the courage it takes to perform.
- Empathetic by remembering that every singer is on a unique artistic journey.
- Encouraging by recognizing strengths while offering opportunities for growth. Educational by helping singers understand not only what to improve, but how to improve it.
- Engaging by writing in a conversational, accessible style.
- Informative by providing accurate and meaningful observations.
- Insightful by identifying the underlying causes of challenges.
- Inspiring by offering ideas that motivate continued study.
- Outstanding adjudicators strive to be:
- Perceptive by listening carefully before reaching conclusions.
- Sensitive by choosing language that builds confidence rather than diminishes it.

Writing Comments That Matter

The most valuable comments are those a singer wants to read more than once.

Whenever possible:

- Begin with something the singer did well.
- Focus on the most meaningful aspects of the performance rather than trying to mention everything.
- Offer practical suggestions using encouraging language such as consider, explore, continue to, aim for, or imagine.

Remember that every comment should be:

- Clear enough that both singer and teacher understand your intent.
- Honest without being harsh.
- Kind without avoiding constructive feedback.
- Specific enough that the singer knows what to practice.

Take one final look at your comments and ask:

- Are they complete, legible, and easy to understand?
- Do my written observations support the score I assigned?
- Have I balanced affirmation with constructive guidance?
- Will these comments help the singer and teacher move forward?

Our scores and comments should always tell the same story. High scores should reflect strong performance with thoughtful refinement, while lower scores should include clear guidance that points toward future growth. Every singer deserves feedback that is fair, consistent, and rooted in respect.

Our Shared Commitment

At its best, NATS adjudication is an extension of teaching. Every audition is an opportunity to encourage artistic growth, celebrate progress, and help singers leave the room more confident and better equipped for their next performance. When our comments are thoughtful, our scoring is consistent, and our language reflects empathy and professionalism, we uphold the educational mission of the National Student Auditions and honor the trust that singers place in us.