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
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NSA MUSICAL THEATRE (MT) REGULATIONS

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

ACCOMPANIMENT	A live collaborative pianist is required for in person MT auditions. A piano-only accompaniment track is allowed only for video auditions in MT.
ACTING	In an MT audition, a singer is portraying a character telling a story. A story requires a distinct beginning, middle, and ending. When integral to the character and storytelling, physical movement is essential. Movement that does not serve to facilitate the character's communication should be avoided. Fully danced choreography should be avoided.
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.
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 NSA categories (Classical, Commercial Music, Musical Theatre, and/or Spirituals) may NOT use the same selection in more than one category.
JUDICIOUS CUTS	Full, complete selections are required; however, judicious cuts in piano introductions, piano interludes, piano postludes as well as internal cuts within selections are allowed as is common professional performance practice. Cuts of verse or verses of selections are not allowed.
MEMORIZATION	All repertoire must be performed from memory.
MUSICAL THEATRE SONG LITERATURE	MT Song Literature is defined as songs by a composer of musicals. MT Song Literature includes songs cut from musicals, songs from unfinished musicals, songs from unproduced musicals, songs written specifically for musical theatre artists, or cabaret-styled musical theatre songs not from a musical.

NSA MUSICAL THEATRE (MT) REGULATIONS, cont.

MUSICAL THEATRE SELECTIONS	Repertoire is selected from musicals including filmed, animated, televised, or internet musicals, revues, operettas, theatrical song cycles, televised or streamed musical series, and musical theatre song literature. Only one of the required selections may be an operetta aria or from musical theatre song literature.
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE	Selections must be sung in the original language or in translation as warranted by common professional performance practice.
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.
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 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

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

NSA MUSICAL THEATRE AUDITIONS RUBRIC

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

REMINDER: All vowels in MUSICAL THEATRE are some form of a MIX of Mode I (Chest/TA) and Mode II (Head/CT).

- **Speech Mix:** Based on the closed vowels of vernacular speech. A Mode I (Chest/TA) dominant quality.
- **Belt Mix:** An acoustic strategy. A Mode I (Chest/TA) dominant call between G4 and D5. Resonance is achieved on American open vowels as in "hat," "met," and "shot." Above D5 in Mode I (Chest/TA) dominant resonance, high belt is achieved on American closed vowels as in "hoot" and "feet." A belt is used to express moments of soaring emotion. Belt is dynamically balanced with energized airflow. It may be vibrant or retain a straight tone.
- **Legit Mix:** An acoustic strategy. Mode II (Head/CT) dominant. Legit refers to a more spacious resonance similar to classical singing but retains speech-like articulation.

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
TONE • The singer shows mastery of the vocal techniques required for the repertoire selected. (See above) • The singer makes subtle or dramatic vocal adjustments appropriate to the style and-character. • The singer produces a wide variety of vocal colors throughout the song in the service of character, story, and style. • Resonance is speech-like; intelligibility is a priority.	The singer is beginning to show ability in vocal techniques and is able to make some appropriate choices in keeping with the character, story, and style. Singer needs to explore more control of registration/ resonance shifts and adjustments to serve character, story, and style.	The singer shows advancing skill in vocal techniques and is making some appropriate choices in keeping with the character, story, and style. The singer shows some control of registration/ resonance shifts and makes some adjustments to serve character, story, and style.	The singer is mastering vocal techniques and makes appropriate choices in keeping with the character, story, and style. Singer shows intentional control of registration/ resonance shifts and makes adjustments to serve character, story, and style.
BREATH & ALIGNMENT • Inhalation is easy, full, and efficient. • Exhalation provides stability, support, and vocal energy. • Alignment is dynamic and free to express the physical life of the character.	The singer is beginning to show easy, full, and efficient inhalation. Exhalation needs to provide more stability, support, and vocal energy. Breath needs to flow more evenly without being pressed. Alignment needs to become more dynamic and free to express the physical life of the character.	The singer shows easy, full, and efficient inhalation with increasing consistency. Exhalation often provides stability, support, and vocal energy. Breath often flows evenly without being pressed. Alignment is often dynamic and free to express the physical life of the character.	The singer is mastering easy, full, and efficient inhalation. Exhalation provides stability, support, and vocal energy. Breath flows evenly without being pressed. Alignment is consistently dynamic and free to express the physical life of the character.
LANGUAGE & DICTION • The lyrics are sung with accurate pronunciation and effective articulation in the style and vernacular appropriate to the character. • The singer embodies a thorough understanding and communication of the lyrics.	The singer needs more accurate pronunciation and more effective articulation in the style and vernacular appropriate to the character. The singer needs to understand and communicate the lyrics more effectively.	The singer is often using accurate pronunciation and effective articulation in the style and vernacular appropriate to the character. The singer often embodies an understanding and communication of the lyrics.	The singer is mastering accurate pronunciation and effective articulation in the style and vernacular appropriate to the character. The singer embodies a thorough understanding and communication of the lyrics.

NSA MUSICAL THEATRE AUDITIONS 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
MUSICIANSHIP • Pitches and rhythms are accurate. • The markings of the composer are observed and performed in idiomatic style. • Memorization is organic and accurate	Pitches and rhythms need to be more accurate. More markings of the composer need to be observed. The style requires further study. Memorization is incomplete.	Most pitches and rhythms are accurate. Most of the markings of the composer are observed and performed in idiomatic style. Memorization is organic and mostly accurate.	All pitches and rhythms are accurate. The markings of the composer are observed and performed in idiomatic style. Memorization is organic and accurate.
ARTISTRY • The performance synthesizes vocal and physical communication to embody a specific character and story. • The listeners are engaged in an honest and believable performance	The synthesis of vocal and physical communication needs to embody the character and story more clearly. Performance skills and artistry are emerging. The performance is superficial or artificial.	The singer is advancing in the ability to synthesize vocal and physical communication to embody the character and story. The performance is mostly honest and believable.	The singer is mastering the ability to synthesize vocal and physical communication to embody the character and story. The performance is honest and believable.
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 efforts toward 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

NSA MUSICAL THEATRE SAMPLE COMMENTS

Each singer's performance is adjudicated in comparison to the following

NSA 2026-2027 SEASON

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
TONE • The singer shows mastery of the vocal techniques required for the repertoire selected. (See above) • The singer makes subtle or dramatic vocal adjustments appropriate to the style and-character. • The singer produces a wide variety of vocal colors throughout the song in the service of character, story, and style. • Resonance is speech-like; intelligibility is a priority.	• Pretty voice. • Chest voice is a bit of a struggle-hard to hear. • Continue to strive for a brighter balance in your overall vocal production. • Continue developing vocal colors that serve character and story. • Registration shifts need greater consistency. • Prioritize speech-like resonance throughout the performance.	• You have a rich, full head voice. • Work for more balance in your belt, as it gets a little heavy and pressed at times. • Excellent legit singing. • The belt has too much chest in the mix, which is flattening the pitch. • You are negotiating the demands of this contemporary rep. really well for the most part.	• In the opening section, you do an excellent job of balancing the registration for a really natural speech mix. • In the climax of the belt section, strive for more vibrancy within your registration in order to balance the increasing amount of chest in the tone. • I love the clarity and honesty of your sound.
BREATH & ALIGNMENT • Inhalation is easy, full, and efficient. • Exhalation provides stability, support, and vocal energy. • Alignment is dynamic and free to express the physical life of the character.	• Greater breath efficiency would support phrasing and vocal stability. • Some phrases lose energy before completion. • Continue developing breath management that serves the style of the song.	• Breath management supports most musical and stylistic demands. • Increased consistency will further enhance vocal freedom and expression. • Your breathing is sometimes too high in the torso/chest. Work to bring it in lower and stay connected through the end of each phrase.	• Continue to strive for breaths that are inspired by your emotional intent. • Consider maintaining the low inner core connection for most of your inhalation/exhalation cycles... • The buoyant alignment/stance you do so well should help you keep that stability in your core follow-through.
LANGUAGE & DICTION • The lyrics are sung with accurate pronunciation and effective articulation in the style and vernacular appropriate to the character. • The singer embodies a thorough understanding and communication of the lyrics.	• I am struggling a bit to understand the first sentence. • Some syllables are indistinct. • Don't over modify your vowels. The tone isn't carrying the thought and we no longer understand the word.	• I can understand most of your words, but sometimes lose the clarity in the low sections. • Syllables are too evenly weighted, which can detract from the meaning of your line.	• In the lower range, strive for more brilliance by keeping more open to the mask as you descend to balance the intelligibility of your words in the low sections. • Consider speaking the line like a monologue and note where you naturally stress and release syllables, then incorporate that into the way you sing it.

NSA MUSICAL THEATRE SAMPLE COMMENTS, cont

STANDARD	DEVELOPING 70-79 POINTS	ADVANCING 80-89 POINTS	MASTERING 90-100 POINTS
MUSICIANSHIP • Pitches and rhythms are accurate. • The markings of the composer are observed and performed in idiomatic style. • Memorization is organic and accurate	• Fine legato singing and expressive phrasing. • Your mix is great. • Be careful not to over sing. • Aim for even more precision with each note and rhythm.	• In the Golden Age selection, you sing with beautiful line and lyricism. • Your contemporary mix could use more chest balanced in the sound in order to increase audience understanding.	• Thank you for selecting pieces that showcase your different styles and abilities. • As you explore the more contemporary mix, consider speaking through the text in your own vernacular.
ARTISTRY • The performance synthesizes vocal and physical communication to embody a specific character and story. • The listeners are engaged in an honest and believable performance	• Gestures are often too predictable. • Good expressive energy here. • Character development needs greater specificity. • Increase commitment to the emotional journey.	• This piece needs something more tender and intimate in its approach to show the difference in the character from the first selection. • Character remained engaging throughout most of the performance. • Continue deepening emotional specificity.	• Consider going back and working through the lyrics of this piece like a monologue, and see if you can find not just the truth of the words, but unearth the backstory of this character. • I want to understand who Lawrence is and what is being revealed about him in the meaning behind these words.
ENSEMBLE (comments only) • The singer and pianist coordinate their efforts toward the same artistic goals in the performance.	• Greater coordination with the 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 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.