A Bare Bone Course in Basic Conducting
Richard L. Openshaw PhD

Conducting Terminology:

Chorister: The Leader of the Pack (Choir = an organized group of singers, especially in a church)

Conductor: The Director of the Pack (Orchestra or Chorus = a group of singers who sing large compositions usually written on all parts)

Beat: The temporal unit of a composition, as represented by the movement of a conductor’s hand. The duration of the beat depends on the tempo.

Meter: In a given composition, the basic grouping of beats and accents, as found in each measure. It is indicated by the Time Signature. [Meters generally are duple or triple or some combination. Quadruple 4/4 is double duple.]

Accents (metric): Accented or stressed beats that fall in a pattern. Repeated in each measure.

Time Signature: A sign given at the beginning of a composition to indicate its Meter (time). It consists of two figures written like a fraction, the lower figure indicating the chosen unit of measurement, the upper figure indicating the number of such units in a measure.

Simple Meter: Meters such as 2/2, 2/4, 3/4, 3/8, are examples of simple meters.

Compound Meter: Meters such as 6/4, 6/4, 6/8, 9/8, are examples of compound meters. They are formed by multiplying the upper number of simple meter by 3.

Tempo: Meaning time. The rate of speed of a composition or section as indicated by “tempo marks” or by “metronome indications”. Allegro, Adagio, Presto, are examples of general tempo indications. Only metronome indications can give one an exact tempo indication. [q = 120]

Rhythm: Rhythm is broadly defined as everything pertaining to the duration quality (long-short) of musical sounds. It forms the counterpart of motion to the pitch; i.e. Pitch is sound up or down, Rhythm is sound long or short.

Cue Beat: An extra beat given to prepare the group to begin. Sometimes referred to as the preparatory beat.

Cut-Off: The final motion of the conductors hand which indicated the end of the final beat of a composition.
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Divided Beat: Sub-dividing the beat pattern to help the singers or players stay together. Generally used in complicated rhythmic passages or works that have a very slow tempo.

Fermatas: A pause or extension of sound on a certain note or rest. It lengthens the duration of that beat or part of a beat only.

**Beat Pattern Examples:** [for class practice]

| The Two Pattern | #5 | High On The Mountain Top |
| 2/4, 2/2, or 6/8 [fast tempos] | #9 | Come, Rejoice |
| | #13 | An Angel from on High |
| | #50 | Come, Thou Glorious Day of Promise |
| | #105 | Master, the Tempest Is Raging |
| | #201 | Joy To the World |
| | #226 | Improve the Shining Moments |

| The Three Pattern | #3 | Now Let Us Rejoice |
| 3/4, 3/2, 9/8 | #62 | All Creatures of Our God and King |
| | #67 | Glory To God on High |
| | #176 | ‘Tis Sweet to Sing |
| | #174 | While of These Emblems We Partake |
| | #292 | O My Father [139 Old Book 9/8] |

| The Four Pattern | #7 | Israel, Israel, God Is Calling |
| 4/4 | #92 | For the Beauty of the Earth |
| | #94 | Come, Ye Thankful People |
| | #134 | I Believe in Christ |
| | #140 | Did You Think to Pray |

| The Six Pattern | #142 | Sweet Hour of Pray |
| 6/4, 6/8 (slow) | #204 | Silent Night |
| | #221 | Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd |
Cue Beat

It is not enough to know how to steer a car. You must also know how to put the key in the ignition and start the motor and then put it in gear. With music, you must know how to prepare the singers to sing. They need to know by your beat pattern when to prepare to put their vocal chords in gear. This is the preparation that tells the singer when to “breathe” and get ready to sing.

Besides telling the singer to breathe, the Cue Beat establishes the tempo for the singers. The Size and Shape of the Cue Beat establishes the mood and volume the people are to sing.

Some Examples:

4/4 Start on the Down Beat

#84 Faith of Our Fathers
#107 Lord, Accept Our True Devotion

4/4 Start with a pick-up beat

#6 Redeemer of Israel
#60 Battle Hymn of the Republic
#130 Be Thou Humble

2/2 Start with a pick-up beat

#5 High On The Mountain Top
#219 Because I Have Been Given Much
#207 It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
#226 Improve the Shining Moments

4/4 Sub-divided with a pick-up beat

#86 How Great Thou Art
#97 Lead, Kindly Light
#157 Thy Spirit. Lord

4/4 Sub-divided with rests
The Divided Beat

Sometimes it is necessary to sub-divide occasional beats for specific problems. Even though we may only sub-divide on or two beats for a certain problem, we should learn the complete divided beat pattern:

Divided Two:  Divided Three  Divided Four

Uses For Divided Beat:
1. For a cue beat or other pick-up beat where the starting note is half of a pulse beat [“and”]
2. To control a retard
3. For very slow, broad tempos.
4. To help singers

Some Hymns that may use divided beat patterns:
- #29  A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief
- #52  The Day Dawn Is Breaking
- #62  All Creatures of Our God and King
- #86  How Great Thou Art
- #157 Thy Spirit, Lord, Hath Stirred Our Souls
- #183  In Remembrance of Thy Suffering
- #292  O My Father
- #340  The Star-Spangled Banner

Fermatas

Generally there are two types of fermatas, cut and un-cut. A cut fermata usually is at the end of the phrase and requires a complete cut off. An un-cut fermata is usually found in the middle of a phrase. It is designed to prolong the beat without a complete stop
Cut Fermata Examples:

#30  Come, Come, Ye Saints
#62  All Creatures of Our God and King
#68  A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
#76  God of Our Fathers, We Come Unto Thee
#110 Cast Thy Burden upon the Lord
#136 I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Un-Cut Fermata Examples:

#27  Praise to the Man
#294 Love at Home
Types of Conductors

Flamboyant Fredrick: Excessive movement, boundless enthusiasm with a touch of exhibitionism. The congregation feels tired, worn out, and far from a “worshipful” atmosphere. There is also the feel that at any minute something of Fredrick’s will break.

Timid Tommy: Leads with the hope that no one is watching him. Conducting is an ordeal that is to be endured. The congregation is less than enthusiastic and listless.

Apathetic Andy: Shows absolutely no emotion from his face or movements. Goes through all of the hymns with little or no awareness of the mood or spirit that they convey. Likewise the congregation misses the message of the hymn and the spirit is not felt.

Friendly Frieda: She is full of sweetness and happiness. Everything is alright. She is completely happy with the results regardless of how ineffective they may be. Regardless of the outcome, it is always “beautiful, wonderful, etc.”

Unprepared Ursula: Ursula is glued to her music. There is no eye contact with the audience. She likewise is not reacting to the product but trudging away regardless of what is happening in the congregation. Likewise, the congregation is not following her but glued to their books as well.

Wrathful Wanda: There is certainly fire is her eyes. She is always watching for the littlest of mistakes or miscues. She immediately upbraids the choir for its lack of attention, practice, lack of seriousness, etc. Choir members and congregation alike are afraid to sing out for fear that the Wrath of Wanda is forth coming.

Cool Calvin: With practice, diligence, and an understanding of the spirit, one can avoid the pitfalls of the previous conductors. He is inspiring. He brings out the best in your singing. He has a confidence that the Lords loves music and wishes for all of children to acquire some experience in the singing of sacred hymns.