

## Preparing for a Workshop

by Miriam Blatt [Nov. 2014, updated June 2024]

**Preparing in advance for a workshop is the best way to be sure we get the most from our coaching and playing experience.**

As a string player, I know that on a string instrument most notes can be played on at least three different strings with four different fingers, so there can be twelve possible fingerings for each note. It takes time to figure out the best compromise between ease of getting one's fingers into the right place at the right time, likelihood of achieving reasonable intonation, and quality of sound on each string, relative to what the piece demands. Doing this on the fly at workshop day is stressful and reduces our ability to pay attention and learn whatever the coach is trying to tell us.

CMNC now notifies participants of their assignments about 16 days before the workshop. These are the steps I recommend you follow to make good use of this time.

### **Obtaining music**

The first step is to obtain music. Most mainstream pieces out of copyright can be found at [imslp.org](https://imslp.org). Searching in Google for "composer [title] imslp" will usually bring you directly there. The CMNC website recommends imslp and also a lot of other places which can be found at our website [cmnc.org/music/obtain-music/](https://cmnc.org/music/obtain-music/).

Popular pieces often have several versions on IMSLP. It pays to scroll down to look for the one rated with the most stars, and view it to see whether it has measure numbers and decent page turns, before deciding which one to print.

It is important that everyone in your group use the same edition at the workshop, so be sure to check this with your group. In the event that you end up with different editions, on the workshop day you should use the edition provided by CMNC.

If you have difficulties obtaining music, the first place to request help from is other members of your group. Your assignment email has their names, and a link to the roster where you can find their emails and phone numbers.

If nobody in your group is able to help with obtaining music, in your emailed assignment notifications, you will see a link to a form to request difficult-to-find music from our librarian. Ways to look for the music before submitting the request are included on the form.

All of the resources can also be used for obtaining scores. And YouTube is a great place to find free recordings of many pieces.

If the score and recording were difficult for your group to find, that might also be the case for your coach. If you are able to obtain the score and recording for obscure works, consider sending these to CMNC for forwarding to your coach. We cannot guarantee that your coach will have time to look at them before the workshop, but chances are increased if you make it easy. If you want to provide the score and recording to your coach, [contact us through our website](#).

### **Choosing a movement to work on**

Once everyone has parts, the next question is where to focus practice. This is tough to decide over email. I had an unforgettable experience on this topic some years back at a Santa Barbara workshop. We were assigned the wonderful Schubert cello quintet. Over email, it appeared that everyone would be happy to be coached on the slow movement. However, when we met on the day at the workshop, our second violin found she could not cope with sustaining slow notes the entire day, so we switched to the last movement. Wonderful music, but hair-raising to learn the first violin part on the fly and have to practice through lunch time. I made it to the afternoon performance with a reasonable number of notes in tune, and my hands only just starting to hurt from not having had a break the entire day.

Since that day, my recommendation to everyone is that if your only option for deciding what to practice is email, then **prepare at least two movements**, so there is some choice on the day when you do finally meet.

There is no question that **meeting before the workshop** is a huge advantage if you can do it. It's definitely worth trying if everyone lives within driving distance. If there is one person from far away, it is still worth doing with a sub for the far away person. Trying to find a date two weeks before the workshop can be tough

for many busy people. However, if you don't ask, then for sure it won't happen. I strongly recommend asking your group. For the March 2014 workshop, I had very low expectations that my clarinet quintet group could meet with five busy people. But I went ahead and asked anyway, listing every rehearsal time that seemed possible, even if inconvenient for me. Most dates were eliminated very quickly by others. Nevertheless, we did end up with one date that worked, and it made a huge difference to our workshop preparation. Our coach was really pleased when he heard us. It's also a great thing to be able to read the entire piece at leisure without the time pressure on workshop day.

There is no substitute for hearing your group play together, and seeing everyone's facial expressions as they talk about which movement(s) they are enthusiastic about. This is the best way to select where to focus on workshop day.

One participant wrote that she was nervous about meeting the stronger players in her group, and embarrassing herself by sight-reading. But she agreed afterwards that she would have been more successful in her workshop performance if they had done that and selected which movement(s) beforehand, so she could focus her practice efforts.

Occasionally it happens that, for whatever reason, you simply don't have time to prepare your piece in advance. If that is the case, we urge you to **get in touch with your group** and let them know. One possible solution is to suggest a piece you do know and see whether the group would like to switch. This way the other members can focus their practicing, and the group will get more from the coaching. If your group does decide to switch, you need to **let CMNC know at least a week before the workshop**, so that your coach can also prepare the right piece. The best way to notify CMNC is to use the contact information on the [CMNC website](#). You should receive an email or phone call within two days so that you will know your switch has been accepted.

### **Agreeing on a Target Tempo**

After deciding which movement(s) to practice, the next step is to agree on a target tempo. This might seem like a minor point, but it can make a huge difference. For the March 2014 workshop, my two groups were assigned (not preformed) and met a week before the workshop. The group that chose a target tempo came to the workshop prepared to play at tempo and it just worked. The group that agreed only on which movement came to the workshop with everything vastly under tempo, which unfortunately did not work musically for our piece (Schickele piano

quartet last movement). A lot of effort was spent that day trying to speed things up and keep them in sync, with mixed success. While still fun, it was a far tougher day than with the other group. Even if your group does not meet, you can choose a target tempo by listening to the piece on YouTube, and looking at the difficult sections in your part to predict what you expect to be able to achieve with practice.

## **Adding Measure Numbers**

On workshop day when the coach is trying to communicate with the group, it helps a lot to have measure numbers in the coached parts and also in the score. If the group can agree on one or two movements ahead of time, then it is recommended that **everyone add measure numbers** at the beginning of each line, **before the workshop**. For more detailed instructions on numbering measures, see the page at the end of this document.

The number of measures can be confirmed by sending emails to one another, if your piece is not in the above list.

If you get to workshop day and find that one or more parts or score are missing measure numbers, then it is strongly recommended that you take the five minutes to add them, when your coach leaves to talk with the other group. If a player is having difficulty, volunteer to help. It will end up saving you a lot of time during the rest of the day.

Meeting before the workshop and focusing on one (or two) movements is a way to help your assigned group approach something closer to what one can do when preformed. Ultimately, we hope that some of your assignments lead to opportunities to make new friends you can preform with at future workshops. Preforming is very much encouraged for all levels of players.

# Chamber Musicians of Northern California

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## How to add measure numbers to your music

Although there is no universally-agreed-upon system for counting measures, all players in a group should use the same method. Here is a method that is useful and common to many chamber musicians:

1. The first **full** measure of the first line of a movement is measure 1.
  - a. Do not count any partial (pick-up) measures at the start of a movement.
2. Carefully count measures and write the measure number at the beginning of each line/staff.
  - a. If a single measure is divided across a double bar, across a repeat, across a change of clef, key or meter, or from one staff system to the next, be sure not to count it twice.
  - b. Don't count subdivisions within measures marked by dotted lines.
3. At a repeat with first and second endings, don't count measures in the first ending, just the measures in the second ending. (This will then address the issue of some parts having first and second endings and others having just the repeat bar.)
4. Count trios (e.g. after a minuet), codas or variations in continuity with the preceding printed measures, even if they are not played in that sequence; do not restart from 1.
5. Count each movement individually, starting again with measure 1.
6. Check scores or other parts to confirm accuracy of your numbering. Rehearsal letters are a good place to confirm measure number accuracy among different parts.

For more information and some measure numbers for well-known chamber works, visit:

<https://cmceast.org/downloads/MeasureCounts.txt>