Concert Performance Assessment

Sight Reading Composition Competition 2026

Greetings Composers!

Thank you for your interest in composing music for South Carolina's Adjudicated Orchestra Assessment. The purpose for this project is to annually provide original compositions for young string orchestras to sight read in an effort to create an equitable Concert Performance Assessment experience for all participants.

All submissions will be performed and assessed by a committee of string educators. The committee members will evaluate how accurately the composition follows the provided guidelines set forth below for each specific graded level of music ranging from Grade 0.5 to Grade 4. Before submitting, please ensure that your composition clearly reflects the appropriate musical and technical demands as requested in the guidelines. Submissions that do not follow the requirements may be sent back to the composer for revisions or dismissed from the competition.

We would like to advise composers to think through the lens of a 11 to 17 year old child that is looking at a new piece for the first time. While we are looking for music that is stimulating and technically appropriate, it is crucial that it is presented in a familiar and organized way. If the submission does not meet standard publishing conventions, it will be deemed not appropriate for this sight-reading assessment. Works that have been successful in this competition generally follow basic Western harmony principals in common meters and show an understanding of the technical aspects of each string instrument. In technical passages, it is essential that bowings are marked and fingerings are at least considered. SCMEA Orchestra Division is particularly invested in finding high quality Grade 1 & 2 pieces. Please consider submitting a composition for this level!

Timeline: The deadline for submissions is November 1, 2026. If selected, composers will be notified via email by December 1, 2026. At that point, the compositions will be subject to revisions that should be finalized by early January, 2027. Once revisions have been approved, the composer will be awarded using the scale below. The piece of music will be used by the South Carolina Music Educators Association- Orchestra Division until May 1, 2027. Winning compositions will be awarded an honorarium found on the following page, and composers must refrain from distribution and publication until May 1, 2099.

Sincerely,

Bob Borden robertgborden@gmail.com, Sight Reading Composition Chair

Arlyn Mills arlyn.mills@scmea.net, Concert Performance Assessment Chair

Susan Wines susan.wines@scmea.net, SCMEA Executive Director

Payment Scale

Grade Level	Selections will be utilized during the 2025 Concert Performance Assessment Event as a part of a sight reading assessment and then incorporated into a permanent collection of works only accessible to SCMEA Orchestra Division Members for sight reading preparation. Composer provides permission to SCMEA Orchestra Division for ongoing use until May 2099.
Grade .5	$150 - SCMEA retains permission by composer to be placed in a bank of compositions to be used for future preparation.
Grade 1	$200 - SCMEA retains permission by composer to be placed in a bank of compositions to be used for future preparation.
Grade 2	$300 - SCMEA retains permission by composer to be placed in a bank of compositions to be used for future preparation.
Grade 3 Grade 4	$400 - SCMEA retains permission by composer to be placed in a bank of compositions to be used for future preparation.

Questions?

Please contact Bob Borden, chairperson of the Concert Performance Assessment Sight Reading Committee at robertborden@gmail.com

Submission Process

Submissions must be received by November 1, 2026.

When submitting, the composer must designate the grade level in which the piece is intended. Before submitting, please ensure that your composition clearly reflects the appropriate musical and technical demands as requested in the guidelines. Submissions that do not follow the requirements may be sent back to the composer for revisions or dismissed from the competition. Additionally, the evaluating committee has the authority to move a submitted composition to another graded level if it is best suited in a different graded level.

Scores and parts must be included, in a format that is easily readable by young, student musicians.

Composer names CANNOT be visible on any parts or scores. Composers may submit as many compositions as they wish. Compositions may be resubmitted the following year if not previously selected.

- Composers must complete the agreement for each piece submitted.
- Required: an electronic copy of the piece in pdf and xml.

Submission & Agreement Form:
https://www.cognitoforms.com/SCMEAOrchestra/SightReadingCompositionSubmission2027

Selection Process

Entries will be selected from the 2024 submissions:

[2] Grade 0.5, [2] Grade 1, [2] Grade 2, [1] Grade 3, [1] Grade 4.

The evaluating committee has the authority to move a submitted composition to another graded level if it is best suited in a different graded level.

If the work is selected by the committee, composers will be notified via email by December 1, 2026. Committee members may suggest small revisions to optimize the composition for the sight reading assessment. Recommended revisions should be finalized and submitted by early January, 2026. Once revisions have been approved, the composer will be provided with the honorarium.

Questions?

Please contact Bob Borden, chairperson of the Concert Performance Assessment Sight Reading Committee at robertborden@gmail.com

General Guidelines

Guidelines and rules presented in this document provide criteria for originally composed music appropriate for sight reading repertoire two (2) levels lower than prepared music at the South Carolina Adjudicated Orchestra Assessment. Music submitted for approval must adhere to these guidelines for grade levels .5 - 4 string orchestra music.

Compositions that are chosen by the judging committee are most likely to err on the side of simplicity within the allowed guidelines in regards to musical elements such as key signature, tempo change, and instrument ranges. If a piece contains musical elements that are on the extreme difficulty level in one area, maintain simpler ideas in other elements. Example: Avoid changing from the key of D major to A major with accelerando and pushing a section into an extreme upper range with shifting. All of these elements might be acceptable under the guidelines, but combined create music that is impractical for sight reading performance.

General rules for all submissions:

- No D.S. or D.C. al fine; repeats and 1st and 2nd endings are acceptable
- No percussive sounds from the body or instrument.
- Only commonly used terms and tempo markings such as: Presto, Vivace, Allegro, Allegretto, Andante, Moderato, Largo and Adagio
- Only commonly recognized articulation symbols such as:

- Only commonly used expressions such as:

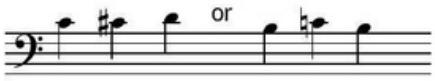
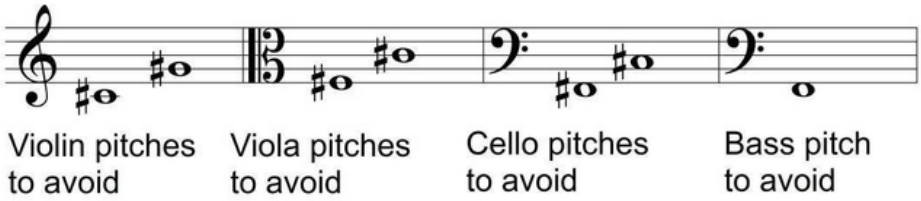
- A bowing marking should be indicated after every rest in grade level .5, 1, and 2.
- There should be rehearsal markings (Letters or Numbers) frequently throughout the selection
- Suggested page lengths for parts:
  Grade .5 and 1: 1 page Grade 2: 1 or 2 pages Grade 3 and 4: 2 pages

  Conductor score pages are not limited.
- Solo passages should be avoided or offered as choice of solo or soli
- Tonalities can be major, minor, or modal with key alterations appropriate to grade levels as indicated on subsequent pages
- Oftentimes, if the presentation of the material is poor, it does have a negative effect on the panel's choice. Please be aware of your notation and how the pages are organized.

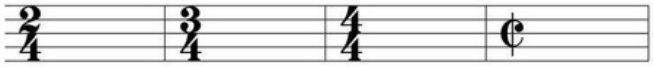
Grade Level .5 Unison and Grade Level .5 Piece

Key	Key with 2 sharps. No key changes. No accidentals.
Meter	No meter changes No tempo changes Tempo options: allegro, moderato, andante
Rhythm	and corresponding rests Dotted half only to be used in 3/4.
Length	0.5 Unison: 16 measures in length 0.5 Piece: 1 Page part (score pages not limited) Time: Max of 2 minutes
Left hand concerns/ Shifting/ Range	Mark in appropriate/optional use of 4th finger in violin and viola parts. There should be limited jumps between notes. Acceptable Violin range/pitches Acceptable Viola range/pitches Acceptable Cello range/pitches Acceptable Bass range/pitches **For Bass Parts: please consider nominal shifts.
Bowing Technique	No slurs, hooks, or ties.
Additional Considerations	No divisi and no double stops are allowed

Grade Level 1

Key	Keys with 1 or 2 sharps with no key changes.
Meter	No more than 1 meter or tempo change. Tempo options: allegro, moderato, andante
Rhythm	
Length	1page parts (score pages not limited) Maximum of 2 minutes
Left hand concerns/ Shifting/ Range	Shifting only in Double Bass to:  Mark in appropriate use of 4th finger inviolin and viola parts. Extended finger patterns are not acceptable for Violin, Viola or Cello. ½ position F natural is not acceptable on bass.  No Divisi and No Double Stops
Bowing Technique	Slurs, hooks, ties are acceptable but not over barlines. Avoid slurred string crossings.

Grade Level 2

Key	C major or relative key, and keys with up to two (2) sharps and two (2) flats and no more than 1 key change. Minimal use of accidentals is acceptable.
Meter	 No more than 2 meter changes
Rhythm	
Length	1 or 2 page parts (score pages not limited) Maximum of 3 minutes (can be multi-movement)
Left hand concerns/ Shifting/ Range	Shifting only in Double Bass- pitches- same as Grade 1 plus ½ position Mark in appropriate use of 4th finger in violin and viola parts. Extended finger patterns are acceptable in 1st position: Acceptable extended range pitches in 1st position (1/2 position for basses) Open string double stops are acceptable
Bowing Technique	Slurs, hooks, ties are acceptable (over barlines as well). Slurred string crossings are acceptable.

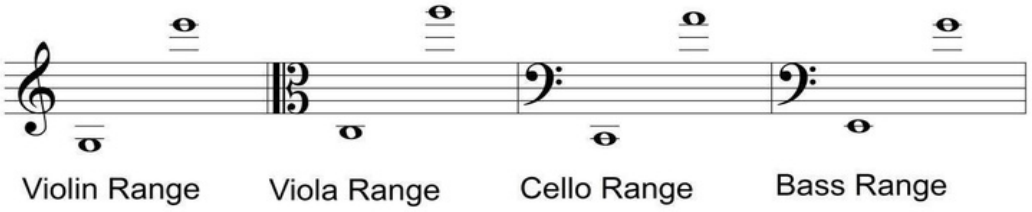
Grade Level 3

Key	C major or relative key, and keys with up to three (3) sharps and three (3) flats and no more than 2 key changes. Key alterations (accidentals) are acceptable. No double sharps or double flats.
Meter	No limit on meter changes.
Rhythm	
Length	1 or 2 pages (score pages not limited) Maximum of 3 minutes (can be multi-movement)
Left hand concerns/ Shifting/ Range	Violin and Viola parts can require shifting to III position Cello part can require shifting to III, III 1/2 and IV positions Double Bass can require shifting no higher than: No alternate clefs or 8va for any parts Natural harmonics may be used Divisi is acceptable
Bowing Technique	Slurs, hooks, ties are acceptable (over barlines as well). Slurred string crossings are acceptable.

Grade Level 4

Key	Keys with up to four (4) sharps and Four (4) flats and no more than 3 key changes. Key alterations (accidentals) are acceptable. No double sharps or double flats.
Meter	No limit on meter changes.
Rhythm	
Length	1 or 2 pages (score pages not limited) Maximum of 4 minutes (can be multi-movement)

Left hand concerns/Shifting/Range



Harmonics can be used. Artificial harmonics may be used sparingly.

No alternate clefs

Bowing Technique	Slurs, hooks, ties are acceptable (over barlines as well). Slurred string crossings are acceptable.