

# Layered Teaching Approach for Solfeggio in Liaocheng Music Examination Training Institute under Shandong Province's 2024 Unified Examination Policy

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**Abstract:** Solfeggio is an essential subject in National College Entrance Music Examinations. Its study affects not only sight-singing and ear training grades but also overall musical literacy and the development of other music-related courses. Therefore, improving the effectiveness of teaching sight-singing and ear training for high school art candidates and upgrading instructors' teaching methods are crucial. As an experienced teacher, the author understands the challenges in teaching this subject and examines the curriculum of a renowned art school in Liaocheng, proposing improvement strategies.

**Keywords:** solfeggio, sight-singing and ear training, layered teaching approach, teaching method

## 1. Introduction

The challenges in teaching sight-singing and ear training are attributed to the lack of a unified standard in training programs, leading to varying approaches in curriculum design, textbook selection, and teaching methods. This paper investigates the current teaching status of sight-singing and ear training at the Liaocheng Wutong Art School, analyzes the existing problems in teaching content, methods, and formats, and offers targeted improvement strategies based on the author's teaching experience. The research is guided by the "Unified Examination Instructions for Music Majors in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions in Shandong Province in 2024"<sup>[1]</sup> and considers student learning situations. The author believes that a layered teaching approach is effective for teaching sight-singing and ear training.

## 2. Premises and Foundations of Layered Teaching Approach

The high school art candidates I have taught have varying conditions and different abilities.<sup>[2]</sup> However, they generally fall into several categories: some have relatively good vocal conditions and excellent mimicking ability but struggle with accurate hearing, knowing if they are singing correctly but unsure of the pitch; some have good pitch accuracy but unstable performance, easily going off-key without the guidance of a piano or teacher; some are intellectually gifted but lack self-motivation and only practice when supervised, relying solely on collective practice during class time for sight-singing and ear training. Over time, the differences in individual abilities and levels are pronounced, as everyone seems to devote the same amount of time and effort to sight-singing and ear training. Coupled with varying individual conditions and comprehension abilities, this naturally leads to disparities in performance, with stronger students becoming overconfident and weaker students entering a cycle of self-doubt and stagnation. Therefore, in specific teaching operations, adhering to traditional teaching models and generic teaching methods will overlook the uniqueness of each student, resulting in academically strong students feeling unfulfilled and academically weaker students being unable to keep up, severely affecting the pace of teaching. This can lead to students questioning their choices, losing confidence and interest in music art exams, and ultimately impacting the enrollment rate of music majors in the class, institution, or school. Therefore, I believe that implementing and continuously improving the layered teaching approach is imperative.

### 3. Content of Layered Teaching Approach

#### 3.1. Basis of stratification

The concept of "layered teaching" is not only applicable to music education, but also mentioned by many teachers and scholars in other subjects. In simple terms, it involves continuously selecting the best students, nurturing their talents, and consolidating their strengths, while also giving opportunities for advancement and providing support for weaker students. This enables effective student flow management across different levels, motivating students at each level to strive and progress together. In the process of teaching sight-singing and ear training, it is necessary to assess the students twice before implementing the stratification. Why twice? The first assessment is conducted when I meet unfamiliar students for the first time. I use some sight-singing and ear training exercises to gauge their level and compare it with the description provided by the teacher who handed them over to me. After the initial assessment, I provide individual guidance to each student and offer suggestions for improvement. The second assessment involves introducing new exercises to assess the students' ability to accept new concepts and knowledge. This plays a crucial role in the future collaboration between teachers and students, which is often overlooked by many educators. For sight-singing, I assess students based on their vocal conditions, music reading skills, pitch accuracy, rhythm stability, understanding of musical phrases and logical relationships, breath control, expression of special terminology, and emotional interpretation.<sup>[3]</sup> These aspects are emphasized in the syllabus of the Shandong Provincial Music Joint Examination, and it is important for us to consider all aspects of students' abilities. In the art school I teach at, I name the highest-performing class after "Qingyu" team, which conveys hope and honor; the intermediate class is named "Hengcheng" team, representing the teacher's expectation for them to have perseverance and serve as a bridge between the other two levels; the class with weaker fundamentals and slower progress is named "Jin Cheng" team, reflecting the idea of proceeding cautiously and making steady progress. This approach not only distinguishes students but also elegantly reveals the purpose and meaning to them, avoiding negative psychological effects that may hinder their learning.<sup>[4]</sup> It is worth noting that in the later stages of sight-singing and ear training, usually from December to January when the art entrance exams approach, the intermediate class gradually disappears and the students gradually split into the two levels. The reasons behind this phenomenon remain to be studied further and are beyond the scope of this discussion. However, it can be affirmed that the methods of motivation and the efforts made by students have yielded visible results.

#### 3.2. Objectives of Layered Teaching

Our teaching objective is to ensure that all candidates can enter university. Based on the students' situations, three levels of students are established, and each level should understand their learning purposes, tasks, goals, and content. This will fully stimulate students' subjective initiative and gradually narrow the gap between levels, leading to overall improvement in students' performance. Of course, setting teaching objectives according to the hierarchy will increase the difficulty for teachers, as they need to consider the differences in students' knowledge and skills, as well as select appropriate teaching methods and set goals for different levels. Patience and resilience are required in the process. Please refer to Table 1 for details.

Table 1 Training content and requirements of different question types for students at different levels<sup>[5]</sup>

Level	Type of question	Content and Standards
Basic level	Mono	All natural levels between a~e <sup>2</sup> are required to be correct.
	Interval (music)	Five categories of fourteen (pure size increase four decrease five) dictation only natural sound level
	Triad	Major and minor triads in situ and inversions, basic T-S-D-T chord connections.
	Rhythm	Basic rhythmic combinations in quarter note and eighth note units
Middle level	Mono	All natural levels between a~e <sup>2</sup> are required to be correct.
	Interval (music)	Five categories and fourteen types (pure size increasing four and decreasing five)
	Triad	Major and minor triads in situ and inverted listening, augmented and diminished triads in situ, mastering basic T-S-D-D <sub>7</sub> -T chord connections

	Rhythm	Complex rhythmic combinations of quarter and eighth note units, legato and rest combinations
	Melody	One sharp or one flat, 8-bar treble clef, range f-a <sup>2</sup>
Higher level	Mono	All natural sound levels between a~e <sup>2</sup> , with temporary variations <sup>#</sup> 4, <sup>#</sup> 5 ( <sup>b</sup> 6), <sup>#</sup> 1, <sup>b</sup> 3, <sup>b</sup> 7, all correct required
	Interval (music)	Five categories and fourteen types (pure size increasing four and decreasing five)
	Triad	The major and minor triads in situ and inversion, the augmented and diminished triads in situ, the basic T-S-D-D <sub>7</sub> -T formula, and the connection of the II, III, VI, VII and other tones, and an in-depth understanding of the chords in the process of connecting the chords due to the principle of proximity may lead to the hair of the inversions.
	Rhythm	Complex rhythmic combinations of quarter and eighth note units, legato and rest combinations
	Melody	One sharp or one flat, 8-bar treble clef, range f-a <sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Specific Implementation of Layered Teaching

##### 4.1. Sight-singing Part

For sight-singing, the most important aspect for students is to practice solving problems through sight-singing and improve their music reading abilities. This not only benefits their immediate exam performance but also contributes to their long-term development. Therefore, efficient preparation for sight-singing is crucial. Based on my years of teaching experience, I have developed an effective review method, which can be applied in daily practice as well as in the high-pressure examination environment. This method is called "**SSD Reading Method**" and "**Two Points and One Line**". "SSD" is an abbreviation for **Scan-Skim-Detailed Reading**; "Two Points and One Line" refers to **key points, difficult points, and linearity and fluency**. The requirements in the examination syllabus are the key points, but each sight-singing exercise will present different difficult points. Linearity and fluency are essential for every candidate, even if there are obstacles or difficulties during sight-singing, maintaining a basic level of fluency is crucial and is an important aspect in the scoring criteria.

So how do we apply the "SSD Reading Method"? Things in the examination room can change rapidly, and the time available for preparation is limited, so time becomes our valuable resource. After receiving a sight-singing exercise (the Shandong Provincial Joint Examination syllabus consists of 8 measures, which is manageable, but in regular practice, I give students exercises with more than 10 measures), we require students to prepare at least two times. The first scan reading is to quickly read through the sheet music and identify areas that may cause difficulty during singing, such as dense rhythms, large leaps, and temporary changes in pitch. These are the areas where students can excel and attract the attention of examiners. The second skim reading involves focusing on the difficult points identified in the first reading, emphasizing specific areas for improvement, and omitting sections that are generally easier and do not contribute significantly to performance differentiation. If time allows, a third detailed reading can be conducted, which involves singing the entire exercise from start to finish. This approach provides a higher level of confidence during the exam.

I have created three study packs for students preparing for the 2024 provincial exam: "Pre-exam Pressure Pack," "Pre-exam Consolidation Pack," and "Pre-exam Emergency Pack." The "Pressure Pack" consists of exercises from the book "French Sight-Singing 1A"<sup>[6]</sup> tailored for high-performing students Figure 2. These exercises are known for their length, use of expressive terms, and ability to enhance logical relationship interpretation. Students are expected to print and master these exercises to meet exam syllabus requirements. The "Consolidation Pack" is designed for intermediate-level students and those starting to improve. It offers supplementary exercises mainly from the book "Monophonic Sight-Singing Course" (Volume 1) Figure 1.<sup>[7]</sup> The "Emergency Pack" is suitable for students with weak sight-singing and ear training skills, or those who struggle with pitch recognition. It includes popular song transcriptions and arrangements, along with original sight-singing exercises. Mastering these exercises can help improve melody perception and handle large leaps. Below are excerpts from the three sets of materials (Figure 1 and Figure 3):



Figure 1 One sheet music material selected from "Monophonic Sight-Singing Course" (Volume 1)



Figure 2 One sheet music material selected from "French Sight-Singing 1A"



Figure 3 One sheet music material written by the author himself

#### 4.2. Ear Training Section

The biggest difference between ear training and sight singing is that sight singing provides a visible and tangible musical score to the examinee, which they study and then "reproduce". On the other hand, ear training is mostly conducted in the form of written exams, where the examinee creates from scratch. The audio played during ear training cannot be seen or touched, and examinees must rely on their own judgment to make notes. This easily creates disparities between individuals. In the following paragraphs, I will share some insights on the different types of ear training exercises:

1) Single Pitches. The ways to test single pitches differ, and the 2024 syllabus included questions on three-tone and five-tone sequences. Yet, the core concept remains the same - assessing the relationship between individual pitches and the reference pitch  $a^1$ . For high-achieving students, we often present 10-20 pitches simultaneously, testing their ability to respond and their memory of pitch  $a^1$ . For those who struggle, I recommend the "five-note surround" method for practice. Here's how it works (Figure 4):

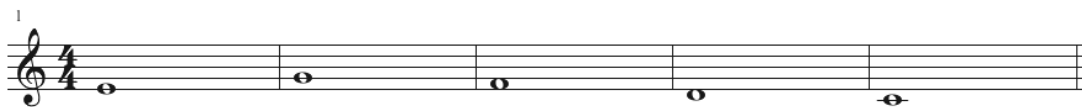


Figure 4 The first question played by the teacher during Ear Training exercise

During instruction, teachers play five pitches, "E-G-F-D-C", which represent the Chinese pentatonic

scale and are closest to reference pitch a1. Ensuring these five pitches are correct is key. Students must sing them in proper order, forming a closed-loop learning process. In subsequent exercises, students identify newly added pitches whether root or interval. A sample question (Figure 5):

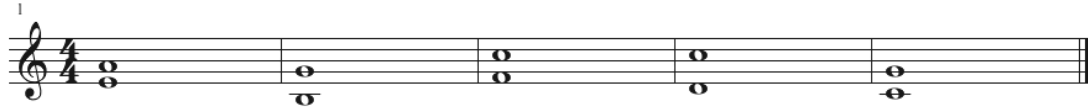


Figure 5 The second question played by the teacher during Ear Training exercise

2) Triads. Students should understand chord characteristics, identify chord progressions. Initially, classify triads into consonant (major, minor) vs. dissonant (augmented, diminished) by sound. After, determine root position, inversion, major vs. minor, augmented vs. diminished. Major sixths have minor third below, perfect fourth above, strong sense of conclusion. Minor triads sound darker, more lyrical. Major seventh chords have pure lyrical feeling. Augmented & diminished chords are dissonant.

3) Triads Progressions. If chords can connect, likely in same key, starting and ending chords same or similar functions. Explain common progressions: T-S-T, T-D-T, T-S-D-T. Use C major as example, understand scale degrees, functions.

$$\textcircled{1} T-S_4^6-D_6-D_5^6-T; \textcircled{2} T_6-S-D_4^6-D_3^4-T_6; \textcircled{3} T_4^6-S_6-D-D_7-T_4^6$$

During the process of listening and memorizing, teachers should guide students to discover the secrets, which lie in the melodic lines. Each of the three progression methods corresponds to a different melodic line (Figure 6).

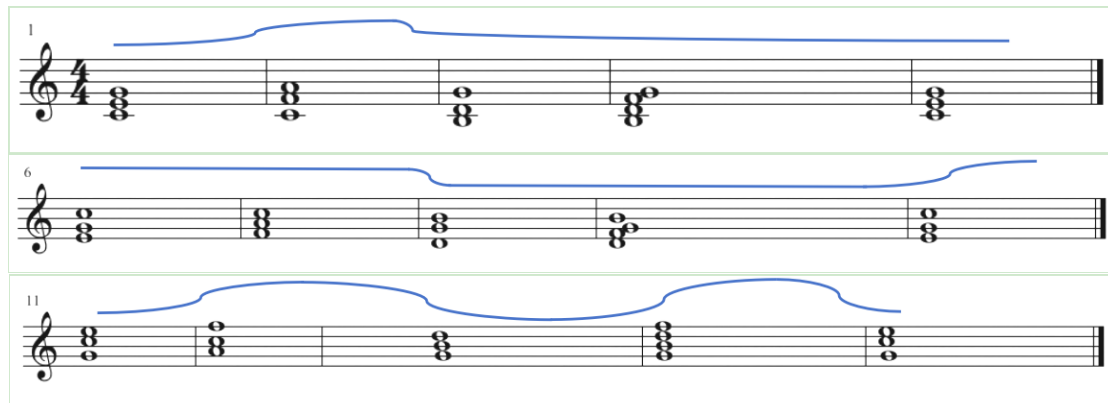


Figure 6 Schematic diagram of the three kinds of triads progressions announcements

Students can develop a sense of chord progression by first drawing a basic melodic line and then determining its approximate progression. For beginners, instructors can specify the pitches making up the melodic line (e.g., G-A-G-G-G). After grasping the pitch, students can listen to the chord progression and experience the melody's prominence.

Unstable scale degrees II, III, VI, and VII are excluded from the pitches to be identified because the natural triads they form are minor triads, which the major scale progression doesn't emphasize. Recognizing these triads can be based on their color within the chord progression (Figure 7).

Names of notes :	C	D	E	F	G	A	B
Stages :	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Functions :	T	S <sub>II</sub>	DT <sub>III</sub>	S	D	TS <sub>VI</sub>	D <sub>VII</sub>

Figure 7 A list of the names, stages, and functions of the seven natural basic scales

Using C major as an example, the author analyzes the functions of natural triads formed by the

seven basic scale degrees and compares them to popular food names and their significance. The I, IV, and V degrees are tonic degrees, akin to staple foods like steamed buns, rice, and noodles in Chinese cuisine. The dominant seventh chord, derived from the dominant triad, is like upgrading a plain noodle dish to a spicy and flavorful one. In major keys, minor triads formed by II, III, and VI degrees should appear in small quantities to avoid disrupting the tonality. These correspond to specific types of food: roujiamo (a Chinese sandwich), Hunan-style beef stir-fried noodles, and Liuzhou snail rice noodles from Guangxi. While trying different flavors is acceptable occasionally, it should not be a regular occurrence to avoid becoming "too spicy" or greasy. The leading tone VII forms a diminished triad, requiring caution—similar to dark cuisine in daily life. The author lists "durian and chive steamed buns" as an example, which is uncommon in daily life, and people ultimately prefer steamed buns as their staple food.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper explores the effectiveness of a layered teaching approach for solfeggio in a Liaocheng music examination training institute under Shandong Province's 2024 unified examination policy. It investigates the current teaching status, identifies areas for improvement, and proposes targeted improvement strategies. The study finds that uneven teacher quality, inadequate facilities, a single textbook unable to meet teaching needs, and the collective nature of teaching contribute to the challenges faced in sight-singing and ear training instruction. Other factors like school-curriculum relations, teacher-student relationships, parent-society connections, and student differences also impact teaching implementation.

Given the raised university entrance exam threshold, the paper suggests strengthening curriculum development, utilizing modern educational technology, and optimizing teaching methods. It further recommends incorporating Chinese ethnic folk music characteristics into instruction. The study concludes that improvements in sight-singing and ear training teaching are necessary to better cultivate students' musical qualities and professional skills. To achieve this, teachers should explore innovative methods, optimize approaches, and apply differentiated teaching strategies based on students' abilities. By doing so, teachers can stimulate students' interest, enhance their confidence, and eliminate negative psychological factors. Utilizing a layered teaching approach can mobilize students' enthusiasm and competitiveness, ultimately improving their sight-singing and ear training knowledge and skills. This comprehensive approach caters to various student needs and enhances their internal motivation to learn.

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