

Barbershop Blend

So, what does blend mean to your barbershop singing?

- Good blend between voice parts is mostly about good blend between individuals. Any work you do on fixing blend between voice parts is really going to boil down to getting individual singers to buy into the "let's blend" mentality.
- Work together to have similar sounding voices, similar fingerprints and spectrum analysis' then your voices will blend to sound like one
- To work on this blend you HAVE to listen to the singers around you – and I mean really, actively listen.
- Not only do you need people to be willing to listen and blend, but you'll need some kind of agreement (even if it's unspoken) of what you're blending towards.
- Sing in unison – lots. This takes away the need to have to listen to your vertical tuning (where you fit in the chord) and it gives you more head space to concentrate on matching your sound. The more that you practice, the more it becomes second nature.
- Get a Lead to record themselves singing the song, and sing in unison with it away from group rehearsals, then sing against it with your own part.
- Different songs, different parts of songs and even different words of the same song might require a bit more bright clarity or richer darkness in them to achieve the best music. Experiment!
- Every quartet and chorus is different so, if you move parts, change choruses or quartets, then you need to start your listening all over again.

EXERCISE

For simplicity, you can't beat this exercise called **Unison Vowels**

- Get a group where they can actually hear each other. Standing in a tight circle of 4 to 12 people is ideal. If your group is too big to do that, then consider breaking them out into smaller groups for this exercise.
- Have all voice parts sing, in unison, a particular vowel sound on the exact same pitch (not octaves,) perhaps the A just below middle-C. Sustain the singing as long as is necessary to observe effects, make corrections, etc. People will probably need to "stagger breathe" or individually sneaking a breath and re-joining the group singing.

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What you're looking for:

- You want everyone to listen and correct to get on the same pitch. If they don't do that, then these other blending effects will probably be destroyed.
- You want everyone to sing at the appropriate volume, where they're conscious of both their own volume level and (more importantly) the group's collective volume level.
- You want everyone to pronounce their vowel sound in the same way (e.g. are they all actually singing the exact same "ah" part of the "iih" triphthong ("ah-eh-ee",) or is someone jumping ahead and holding the "ee" part, which will sound nasty.
- You want everyone to be using the same sort of resonance; e.g. everyone is singing with a clean, light "head" resonance, or is someone resonating nasally/post-nasally, or is someone belting it out with a "mouth resonance". The key is that everyone should be doing that same resonance (= blending), not just doing their own thing.
- If you happen to be using a rather pure vowel sound (e.g. "ooo" or "ahh") and a rather clean resonance ("head"), and if people are listening and correcting their pitches, then you should start hearing audible acoustic effects like overtones (will sound like a phantom person singing one octave up, and maybe a fifth above that, too) and beat patterns (= slow oscillations when someone is close but not exactly on pitch... you listen for the beats, correct your pitch, and the beats will slow and then disappear)