

LEAD

The Lead gives the song “heart.” The lead is in charge of the song’s message and interpretation. She must be able to sing the song and its phrases with feeling and flow. A lead must **want** to sing the song if the ensemble is ever to sing it well. She is the focal point and establishes the personality of the ensemble. The lead is the only child, she’s the boss, a chosen and born leader. The lead works harder and prepares more thoroughly than others. All other parts must tune to the lead; whither she goest, so go they. She must have a commitment to accuracy and to be “on” all the time, on both the key and the stage. A lead should study the melody and be creative and expressive with its delivery. Take into account the critical words and always keep forward motion in mind. Look for the climax (two are even better—a sub-climax and the real thing). Take the melody and message to its highest point, enthrall the listeners, and take them to a new level of musical joy and understanding.

Defining qualities:

Good solo voice—most important quality is that it is freely produced with an open, soaring sound; it should be pleasing to hear, clear, and have a distinctive style. The lead needs to develop melodic flexibility and smooth transition over breaks. The voice must be well-supported and have sufficient strength for other parts to hang onto. It should be consistently resonant in the complete range with correct focus, placement, and textures.

- 🎵 Willingness to take critique and improve
- 🎵 Continuing to improve, even after reaching obvious goals
- 🎵 Giving time and commitment to reach goals
- 🎵 Vulnerability—opening self to audience
- 🎵 Passion and Soul
- 🎵 Sense of personal style
- 🎵 Drama
- 🎵 Consistency
- 🎵 Strong tonal center
- 🎵 Knowing place in chord
- 🎵 Over-and always prepared
- 🎵 Brilliance
- 🎵 Ring, ping, buzz
- 🎵 Ability to sell the message
- 🎵 Super saleswoman
- 🎵 Steady and reliable
- 🎵 Using vocal color to set the mood
- 🎵 Vitality, vibrancy, vigor, vim, vivacity
- 🎵 Resonance throughout range so melody is never lost
- 🎵 Emotion
- 🎵 Richness
- 🎵 Depth
- 🎵 Freedom, Ease
- 🎵 Clarity
- 🎵 Resonance
- 🎵 Color
- 🎵 Warmth
- 🎵 Accuracy
- 🎵 Sense of true pitch
- 🎵 Maintaining tonal center
- 🎵 Skill in designing inflection and interpretation
- 🎵 Consistency in intervals, rhythms, interpretation, breath plan, register transition

Caveat: Quit coaching when you sing; concentrate on your performance. Don’t listen to the others; keep the key, strategize and practice consistently the difficult phrases—especially downward part motion and ascending or jumpy lines. Work on delivering a smooth execution of the transition between the upper and lower register.

Bass

You are the “second lead” in the quartet. Your voice needs to support, complement, and enhance the quality of the lead voice. You may feel the need to sing “faster” to get to the open vowel at the same time as the lead. Your tones will always need to be louder in volume than those of the others because of where they appear in the acoustical range. However, **it’s not how loud you sing but how you sing loud that counts.**

- 🎵 Avoid reverse coning
- 🎵 Minimize consonants—aim for a smooth vocal line
- 🎵 Keep the feeling of humming as you sing
- 🎵 Sing with fearless authority and command
- 🎵 Because you are a true “ham,” you have great stage presence
- 🎵 You are the rock star in barbershop!
- 🎵 Understand the strength of the root and fifth of the chord, the tones you sing most often.
- 🎵 The goal for bass sound is melodic quality, a mellow, broad tone with clarity, focus, sufficient volume and weight
- 🎵 You keep song in pitch, in rhythm
- 🎵 Look for octave locks with tenor, especially key note tone

Your range and resonance are important, but resonance is more so. The quality and timbre of your voice determines the quality of the cone of entire group. Solidarity in the barbershop sound is vital. A house built on sand hasn’t a prayer.

Baritone

The baritone part is for the person able to mix her right and left brain. The singer must be able to get the technique in hand and then sing like it does not exist.

Baris have to be willing to take a back seat to the lead, knowing all along that the bari makes or breaks the lead. Learn to sing with slightly less authority and clarity than lead---with emphasis on “slightly”

Adhesiveness is what the baritone needs to pursue for the perfect vocal “marriage” with the lead. She has the duty to make the lead as beautiful as she can be. What the lead does, so does the bari. She must be willing to be in the background to the lead. The baritone takes on the quality of the lead only but sings with less volume and less clarity and brilliance. —she takes on the quality and nuance of the lead; is a mirror to her; and aims for instant acclimation, instant adjustment, instant reflection, instant lock. She sticks with the lead through everything.

She sings in two voices when above and below the lead. When your part is low, resonate to imitate the bass; high—to imitate the tenor. Below the lead—add depth, richness; above—softer, sparkle. She

continues the bass foundation and “makes the sound barbershop.” Baris are the tofu of barbershop, the chameleon, the glue of the unit.

You constantly shift your position on the cone and the “tone of your voice.” Baris know when to “spike” and when to “mellow out” the tone. Develop a sensitivity to your role in connecting the bass and lead qualities

It is important to know when to “sting” or “float” the note; distinguishing between harmony with the lead note and dissonance

A baritone must have a terrific ear and tuning expertise. She must know how to tune chord components and understand Pythagorean tuning, wherein some notes are “worth more” than others. In tuning, she finds and capitalizes on octaves, scissors, accidentals, dissonant major seconds. You live on octaves and 5ths—lock these with the appropriate part. Work with the tenor to fine tune chords.

Develop vocal agility and flexibility.

Tenor

The tenor completes the sound of the quartet. The magic word for tenors is “lightness.” The ear can easily hear the notes sung in the tenor register, so she can sing more softly--except where she carries the melody or sings below the lead in crossover chords. Her volume will increase as she comes down in her range and closer to the melody notes.

She must be careful of vibrato. She must control it to preserve the accuracy of the chord and the stability of the chord lock. She is the top star on the tree, the point of the cone and the keystone to the sound. Tenors should be seen and just barely heard, most of the time. She should allow her part and range “do the talking” for her.

A tenor sings with bravura, brilliance, a bell-like clarity and ease. It is important that she sing with a straight tone so that the chords will have an optimal chance for lock and ring.

She rides the overtone and makes the sound sparkle.

She does her 25% in the chord consistently and gives 100% of energy all the time.

She sings mostly in head voice, having a cathedral feeling within her mouth.

She has a good ear to tune the chord, always being aware of octaves and locking them with the appropriate part.

She recognizes and understands how to sing “scissors” passages, usually with the bass.

She listens to lead and tunes to her note; usually tunes on high side of her own note.

She should allow vowels to migrate toward a more neutral vowel as tones go high.

She should feel strength in bridge of nose and use plenty of air. “Spend” air; don’t “save it.” Give more width on very high tones. Don’t “pinch” or “squeeze” high notes. Use the upper rib cage for support of high tones. Dynamic volume should decrease as pitch goes up; need to add brilliance as pitch descends.