

Ensemble etiquette & rehearsal words

What happens in the room, and the words used to run it. None of this is written in the music, and all of it is expected from the first rehearsal.

Before you sit down

- Arrive early enough to be tuned and ready at the start time, not arriving at it.
- Bring your own pencil, and a rubber. Every rehearsal changes something.
- Have the part practised. Rehearsal is for playing together, not learning notes.
- Phone off and in the case, not face-down on the stand.

While the music runs

- Silence the moment the conductor stops — instrument down, pencil up.
- Never play alone in a pause. Not a scale, not the tricky bar.
- Lost? Stop, count, and come back in at the next rehearsal letter.
- Mark changes in pencil straight away; you will not remember them next week.

Playing in a section

- Match the leader — bowing, articulation, vibrato and volume all follow them.
- Listen down, not across: tune to the bass line, not to the person beside you.
- Outside player turns the page; keep playing while they do.
- Blend rather than lead. If you can hear yourself clearly, you are probably too loud.

WORDS YOU WILL HEAR IN THE ROOM

From letter B	Start at rehearsal letter B — the boxed letters through the part.	Give me an A	The oboe or leader sounds concert A for tuning.
Bar 41, please	Start on the first beat of that bar, not after it.	Watch the stick	Look up — you are following your part instead of the beat.
Take it from the top	From the very beginning of the piece.	Cut-off	The gesture that ends a held note. Everyone stops exactly together.
Tutti	Everyone plays. The opposite of a solo or a divisi line.	Subito	Suddenly — subito piano means drop at once, not fade.
Divisi (div.)	The section splits into two parts; unis. means back together.	Balance	Who should be heard. Being asked for balance means play under someone.
A due (a2)	Both players on that stave play the same line.	Mark it in	Write the change into your part, in pencil, now.
Pick-up / anacrusis	The beat or two before bar one. Count it in.	Once more, in time	The notes were right; the tempo or ensemble was not.
Sul ponticello	Strings: bow near the bridge for a glassy, brittle sound.	Bell up	Brass: raise the instrument so the sound projects over the band.

APPLAUSE AND PLATFORM

Walk on together, stand when the leader stands, sit when they sit. Tune quietly. Do not applaud yourself — acknowledge the conductor instead.

LOOKING AFTER THE PART

Borrowed music is returned unmarked in pen and unfolded. Rub out your pencil marks at the end of the run unless asked to leave them.

IF YOU ARE THE COMPOSER

Speak through the conductor, never to a player mid-rehearsal. Bring clean parts with bar numbers and rehearsal letters — and thank the section afterwards.