



NATS Audition Rubric

COMMERCIAL MUSIC CATEGORIES

Each singer's performance is adjudicated in comparison to the following standards as applied to the category of entry.

STANDARDS	DEVELOPING 70 – 79	ADVANCING 80 – 89	MASTERING 90 – 100
TO NE Singer shows mastery of the vocal demands of songs selected and makes subtle or dramatic adjustments appropriate to the style and emotional expression. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each commercial style requires a variety of authentic vocal colors and sounds. • Vocal tone may include some form of a mix of Mode I (Chest/TA) and Mode II (Head/CT) as well as varied organic, primal sounds born of raw emotion. • Interpretive vocal stylisms may include varied vocal onsets, releases, nuances, and embellishments, which stylistically color the vocal tone with fry, cry, growl, breathiness, etc. (See <i>CM Terminology</i>) • All CM styles are reliant on amplification. The microphone is used dynamically to facilitate vocal stylisms as well as projection. 	The singer is beginning to show ability in meeting the demands of each song and to make some appropriate choices in keeping with the specific style of each song.	The singer shows advancing ability in meeting the demands of each song and is often able to make appropriate choices in keeping with the specific style of each song.	The singer is mastering the ability to meet the demands of each song and makes appropriate choices in keeping with the specific style of each song.
BREATHING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhalation is efficient to the style and may be noisy or silent in response to raw emotion. • Exhalation provides stability and vocal energy. The appearance of effort may be intrinsic to style. 	The singer is beginning to inhale efficiently to meet the demands of each style. Exhalation needs to provide more stability and vocal energy.	The singer inconsistently inhales efficiently to meet the demands of each style. Exhalation inconsistently provides stability and vocal energy.	The singer is mastering efficient inhalation to meet the demands of each style. Exhalation provides stability and vocal energy.
LYRICS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lyrics are articulated in the style appropriate to the selected style of commercial music. • Vocal tract shaping and diction enhance the individuality of the performance. 	Articulation is incompatible with the style of the song. The singer is beginning to engage the lyrics to embody the essence of each style.	Articulation is often compatible with the style of each song. The singer is often engaging the lyrics to embody the essence of each style.	Articulation is compatible with the style of each song. The singer is consistently engaging the lyrics to embody the essence of each style.
VOCAL STYLISMS* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The song's artistic interpretation includes expressive vocal stylisms characteristic of the selected style. • Vocal stylisms may include varied vocal onsets, releases, nuances, and embellishments such as fry, riffs, cry, growl, etc. (See <i>CM Terminology</i>) 	Vocal interpretations lack the vocal stylisms characteristic of each genre. The singer is beginning to develop a facility with vocal stylisms.	Vocal interpretations include some vocal stylisms characteristic of each selection's style. The singer is developing a facility with artistic vocal stylisms.	Vocal interpretations include vocal stylisms characteristic of each genre. The singer has proficient facility with artistically effective vocal stylisms.
MUSICIANSHIP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance is in tune. • Rhythmic groove enhances the performance. • Memorization is secure and accurate. 	Pitches need to be more accurate. The style and rhythmic groove require further study. Memorization is incomplete.	Most pitches are accurate. The style and rhythmic groove are developing. Memorization is organic and mostly accurate.	All pitches are accurate. The style and rhythmic groove enhance the performance. Memorization is organic and accurate.
ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The performance is authentic. • The performance offers a unique, stylized interpretation of the music. • The performance is specific to the selected style of commercial music. 	The singer needs an increased understanding of the stylistic elements of each selection. The interpretation lacks authenticity and is not unique to the singer.	The singer is advancing in the ability to communicate the stylistic elements of each selection. The interpretation has moments of authenticity unique to the singer.	The singer is mastering the ability to communicate the stylistic elements of each selection. The interpretation is authentic and unique to the singer.
ENSEMBLE (comments only) The singer coordinates with the accompaniment effectively to accomplish artistic goals.	The singer needs to coordinate more effectively with the accompaniment to accomplish artistic goals.	The singer is advancing in the ability to coordinate with the accompaniment to accomplish artistic goals.	The singer is mastering effective coordination with the accompaniment to accomplish artistic goals.

*Edrie Means Weekly coined the term vocal stylism in her teaching of Commercial Music and Musical Theatre.

CM AUDITION REQUIREMENTS

Microphone requirements for all commercial music categories

Auditions are to be performed with amplification. In live auditions, all singers are required to use the amplification equipment provided. In video auditions, the use of a microphone off-camera or on-camera (on a stationary stand, diva microphone, and/or handheld microphone) is an artistic choice influencing interpretation.

High School Categories

TWO CONTRASTING SONGS (one ballad and one up-tempo)

- Each audition may include one or more commercial music style(s)
- Only one song may be an original song, instead of a cover song
- Perform each full song from memory with amplification
- Perform with a pre-recorded instrumental track without backing vocals or perform with a live pianist
- Only one song may be self-accompanied on an acoustic instrument, instead of an instrumental track or live collaborative pianist

1–2 Years Post-High School Categories

THREE CONTRASTING SONGS

- Each audition may include one or more commercial music style(s)
- Only one song may be an original song, instead of a cover song
- Perform each full song from memory with amplification
- Perform with a pre-recorded instrumental track without backing vocals or perform with a live pianist
- Only one song may be self-accompanied on an acoustic instrument, instead of an instrumental track or live collaborative pianist

3–5 Years Post-High School Categories

FOUR CONTRASTING SONGS

- Each audition may include one or more commercial music style(s)
- Up to two songs may be original songs, instead of cover songs
- Perform each full song from memory with amplification
- Perform with a pre-recorded instrumental track without backing vocals or perform with a live pianist
- Up to two songs may be self-accompanied on an acoustic instrument, instead of an instrumental track or live collaborative pianist

COMMERCIAL MUSIC TERMINOLOGY

Arrangements	Original or published arrangements of songs created for Musical Theatre productions are not accepted in CM categories in NATS Student Auditions but may be entered in the Musical Theatre Categories.
Commercial Music	Commercial music includes all genres of vocal music performed by recording artists, not included in the classical and musical theatre NATS Student Auditions categories. Commercial music includes bluegrass, blues, contemporary Christian, country, folk, gospel, jazz, pop, rap, rock, rhythm and blues (R&B), soul, and all ethnic music, <i>etc.</i>
Cover Song	A cover song is a selection performed by someone other than the composer or original recording artist. Performing a cover does not imply an imitation of the original recording artist.
Diva Microphone	A smaller microphone attached to the singer's head.
Microphone Technique	When using a microphone, the singer needs to make intentional choices of the microphone's placement (handheld, on a stationary stand, diva microphone, off-camera), which influences interpretation. When choosing to use a handheld microphone, the singer will make intentional choices in the distance of the microphone from their mouth to create stylized effects.
Rhythmic Groove	An organic embodiment of the beat that goes beyond specific notation or time signature, often referred to as the feel of a song.
Vocal Stylisms*	Commercial music's genre-specific elements of vocal interpretation. Vocal stylisms are often not notated in the music. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate onsets vary among fry, slide, yodel, growl, breathy, cry, creak, flip, scream, <i>etc.</i> • Appropriate releases vary among abrupt glottal stops, breathy, fall-off, fall-up, shadow vowels, fry, creaky, gaspy, <i>etc.</i> • Appropriate nuances/embellishments including riffs/runs, licks, flip, pop-appoggiatura, yodel/register shifts, bends/scoops, <i>etc.</i> Visit _____ to hear specific examples.
Memorization	All selections must be performed from memory.
Comments Only	Any registered student may elect to sing for comments only and participate in the preliminary audition. The judges will not score auditions entered for comments only.
Off Camera	Not visible on video, placed beyond the edge of the camera's frame.
Full Song	An entire song, no internal cuts. Intros and outros may be abbreviated to accommodate audition's time limits.

*Eddie Means Weekly coined this term in her teaching of Commercial Music and Musical Theatre.

