

- **Honor the spoken word.** Always speak the text out loud and make note of where the natural word stresses/accents are! Setting the text in a way that naturally mimics speech is very important - it helps your audience understand the text and helps your singers engage with the text in more meaningful ways! In text setting, there is an important formula: **Accent = length x height**. The accented syllable of a word (and, the important 'goal word' of a phrase) should be set to *longer* note values and *higher* pitches. Try singing the word "amazing" and holding out the [zing] for a very long time - it should feel - and sound - odd; it is! Sustain the [maz] and notice how it now sounds like the word: a-MAZ-ing! Try singing the [a] and the [maz] on two of the same pitch and the [zing] an octave higher - notice how the big melodic leap creates a musical accent on the wrong syllable. Put the octave leap on the second syllable and it's much more natural and effective!
- **Singers have to actually sing your music.** And it should be our goal for them to enjoy singing it. A great fancy Italian word to know is *tessitura* - this word refers to the overall range of where a melodic line sits. Yes, a soprano can sing Fs, Gs, and As above the staff — but not for too long at a time! It's the nature of the mechanics of the voice that singing in the same small range for too long, whether it's low, mid, or high, is very fatiguing for the voice. You'll have unhappy singers who are out of tune anyway. Have a good resource for vocal ranges handy and check your writing as you go. Do you have good variety of tessitura in each part?
- **Don't get stuck in perpetual exposition.** Exposition is an important part of a piece. It's the initial section where you lay out your musical ideas, both harmonic and melodic, and establish the style and the 'flavor' of the piece. The problem is, too often young composers get stuck in an exposition loop, laying out interesting, great material but immediately moving on to a whole new idea, and then a new one, and so on, before they've actually done anything with it. The most common thing I find myself telling composition students is "you've got 5 pieces here!" Explore creative ways to develop your initial material. What can you do that melody to alter it a bit, so that it's clearly derived from what we've already heard? You can develop material in very subtle or very dramatic ways, but thinking this way keeps a built-in cohesion to the piece as you write!
- Please include the punctuation of the poem in the score.
- Watch the word accents, don't put weak syllables on strong beats, etc—feel free to vary the meter. SPEAK the poem out loud a lot.
- If you are going to write a diatonic piece, learn basic rules of harmony regarding parallel fifths, doubled thirds, etc.
- Get more than 5 measures on a page. Work with the formatting of the piece to make it easier for the musicians to read.