



CHOIR NINJA™

CHOIR NINJA QUICK-START GUIDE

Become a Choir Ninja, One Belt at a Time.

Welcome to Choir Ninja! This guide will help you get your program up and running quickly. You do not need to overhaul your rehearsal or spend an entire class period on sight-reading. Choir Ninja is designed to fit into the rehearsal you already run.

1. CHOOSE WHERE YOUR SINGERS SHOULD START

Choir Ninja is scaffolded so students can enter at the level that best matches their current music-reading skills.

Beginner

Best for beginning singers or students who need a strong foundation in music literacy.

Intermediate

Best for singers who already understand basic notation, rhythm, solfège, and stepwise melodic reading.

Advanced

Best for experienced singers who are ready for more challenging rhythms, intervals, keys, and independent reading.

If you are unsure where to begin, start lower rather than higher. Early success helps students learn the Choir Ninja routine and builds confidence before the difficulty increases.

You can also begin the entire class at the same belt and adjust later as needed.

2. INTRODUCE THE BELT SYSTEM

Explain to students that Choir Ninja works like a martial arts progression system.

Each belt represents a new level of music-reading skill. As students develop their skills, they progress through:

White → Yellow → Orange → Green → Blue → Purple → Red → Brown → Black → Grandmaster

The goal is not simply to “pass a test.” Each belt represents skills students are developing toward greater independence as musicians.

Consider displaying the belt progression in your classroom so students can see where they are headed.



3. ESTABLISH YOUR CHOIR NINJA ROUTINE

Choir Ninja works best when music literacy becomes a consistent part of rehearsal. You do not need to spend an entire class period on it. A few focused minutes each rehearsal can make a significant difference over time.

A typical Choir Ninja routine can include two connected components:

Ear Training

Students listen, identify, echo, compare, or sing musical patterns using the ear-training activities for their level.

Sight-Singing

Students apply those same developing musical skills to notation through the Choir Ninja sight-reading exercises.

The exact skills will change as students advance. Beginning singers may be working on steady beat, basic rhythm, finding Do, solfège, and simple melodic relationships, while more advanced singers will work with increasingly complex rhythms, intervals, tonalities, and key signatures.

The goal is for what students **hear** and what students **see** on the page to become increasingly connected.

4. TEACH THE CHOIR NINJA SINGING PROCESS

Before expecting students to sight-read independently, teach them a consistent process for approaching unfamiliar music.

The process should grow with the student.

At the earliest levels, students will not yet know how to identify every symbol on the page. That is intentional. Do not front-load concepts simply because they appear in the music. Teach only the skills appropriate for the students' current level.

BEFORE SINGING

Guide students through the musical elements they have learned so far.

Depending on their level, this might include:

- Establishing or finding **Do**
- Echoing or audiating the starting pitch
- Speaking or performing the rhythm
- Identifying familiar solfège patterns
- Looking for repeated notes, steps, skips, or familiar intervals



- Using Curwen hand signs
- Establishing a steady beat or pulse
- Identifying a time signature or key signature only after those concepts have been introduced

As students progress through Choir Ninja, they gradually take responsibility for more of this preparation themselves.

FREE SING

After preparation, let students sing.

Give the starting pitch and allow students to work through the exercise without the teacher singing along.

This is where the learning happens.

Students should keep the pulse moving, use the strategies they have learned, listen to themselves and the ensemble, and continue even when something goes wrong.

Avoid immediately correcting every mistake. Students need opportunities to hear when something does not sound right and learn how to recover independently.

REFLECT & RETRY

After the first attempt, briefly discuss what students noticed.

Ask questions such as:

- Where did we feel confident?
- Where did we lose our place?
- Was the challenge rhythmic or melodic?
- Did anything sound different from what we expected?
- What should we watch or listen for on the next attempt?

Then try it again.

The second reading gives students an immediate opportunity to apply what they discovered during the first.

Over time, gradually reduce teacher assistance so students become responsible for preparing, hearing, reading, evaluating, and correcting their own performance.



5. CONNECT THE EAR TO THE EYE

Sight-reading is not only about recognizing symbols. Students also need to develop an internal understanding of how music sounds.

That is why ear training and sight-singing work together in Choir Ninja.

Use the Choir Ninja Ear Training activities to reinforce the skills students are developing in the sight-reading curriculum. Students may listen for, identify, echo, compare, or reproduce musical patterns before encountering similar concepts visually.

A simple progression is:

Hear It → Echo It → See It → Sing It

At beginning levels, this connection may be as simple as hearing the difference between pitches, matching a pitch, recognizing melodic direction, or echoing a short solfège pattern.

As students advance, ear training can reinforce increasingly complex melodic, rhythmic, and tonal concepts.

Students do not need to understand everything they see on the page before they begin singing. The Choir Ninja sequence is designed to introduce those concepts gradually.

Teach the skill when students reach it. Practice it with the ear. Connect it to the notation. Then give students opportunities to use it independently.

6. ASSESS BELT MASTERY

When students are ready, use the belt assessment materials to determine whether they have demonstrated the skills required for advancement.

Students do not need a perfect performance to demonstrate mastery. Use the Choir Ninja assessment criteria and rubric to evaluate the complete performance.

Once a student successfully completes the requirements, recognize the achievement and begin working toward the next belt.

7. MAKE PROGRESS VISIBLE

Recognition is an important part of the Choir Ninja system.

Depending on your classroom, you might use:

- Belt shield stickers
- Student belt trackers or passports
- Progression cards
- Classroom displays



- Certificates
- Digital tracking
- Verbal or class recognition

You do not need to use every option. Choose the recognition system that works best for your students and your classroom.

8. ADAPT CHOIR NINJA TO YOUR PROGRAM

Choir Ninja is a framework, not a script.

You can slow down.

You can repeat lessons.

You can spend several rehearsals on a difficult skill.

You can move faster when students are ready.

You can use Choir Ninja with an entire ensemble or differentiate by student ability.

The sequence provides the path. You determine the pace.

YOUR FIRST WEEK

Keep the beginning simple.

Day 1: Introduce Choir Ninja and the belt system.

Day 2: Introduce the first sight-reading routine and model the process.

Day 3: Practice the routine again with more student independence.

Day 4: Continue the next lesson and reinforce expectations.

Day 5: Review the week's skills and celebrate progress.

Do not worry about rushing toward the next belt. The first goal is to establish the routine.

Once students know what to expect, Choir Ninja can become a normal part of rehearsal rather than a separate activity.

YOU'RE READY!

Choose your starting level, introduce the belt system, and begin with just a few minutes each rehearsal.

Keep it consistent. Let students do the reading. Celebrate progress.

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