The Fraction Principle: How To Make Beautiful Music By Playing Less

The Fraction Principle is, perhaps, the most important band-arranging principle any musician, worship leader, or arranger can implement immediately to make their music start sounding 100% better. I first heard about The Fraction Principle from my master arranger/co-writing buddy, Bruce Ellis. He spoke in terms of the "Layering Principle" (which includes The Fraction Principle, plus other ideas on building a band's sound from the ground up). Then I heard Brian Doerksen, well-known worship leader and songwriter, speak of a similar idea he called The Fraction Principle. Whatever you call it, is THE game changing idea for worship leaders arranging bands, and musicians attempting to make beautiful music.



The phrase, "The Fraction Principle" emphasizes the reality that the sound of every band should add up to "1."

In other words, if there are 7 people playing in the band, each band member only plays 1/7 of what they *could* play if they were on their own.

If the sound adds up to 7 – i.e. everyone playing willy nilly what they would play if they were on their own, the music is dense, frenetic, and often downright stressful to listen to.

Ever hear a classical pianist join a worship band who has no training in creating space for the other instruments? Their masterful hands are going everywhere, and there is no need for the other instruments.

Or have you ever heard a band where the acoustic guitar is being strummed by the worship leader like it's going out of style (or like they were leading the group without a band supporting them). Or 4 vocalists are all piling on the microphones with full vibrato? Or the bass player is playing busy bass lines to make sure they get all their chops showing up in *every* song?

The old adage is true. Good music facilitates worship. Bad music distracts us from worship. It's just true.

Applying The Fraction Principle In Your Setting

Here is The Fraction Principle practically applies in a band setting:

- The keyboard player is no longer needed to pound out bass lines with his or her left hand since the bass player is already covering that part.
- The electric player, while he could play every Jimmy Hendrix lick he knows, pulls way back and creates space for the other guitars, keyboards, mandolins, and other instruments.
- Have 4 vocalists? They are now not all singing at the same time. They are choosing parts, and if they are blending, they sound like 1 voice – not 4 (see this post if you are a vocalist or arranger of vocals in a worship context).
- The acoustic guitar player does strum full out, all of the time. They do downstrokes, occasional strums, lightly pick, and more according to what the song demands.
- Musicians who learned classically, or alone in their bedroom, do not need to fill up all the musical space if a band is present. They play primarily with their right hand (to make room for the bass to do their thing), and they play more sparse notes and phrases to fill in the gaps.

I.e. Everyone plays a **fraction** of what they could play when in a band.

Make Space For The Other Instruments

When musicians are making space for one another, the music starts to breathe.

And breathing space in the music… is beautiful.

Apply this simple principle the next time you play or rehearse, as a band.

And when the music starts sounding too dense, remind each other to apply *The Fraction Principle*.

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Question: How is your band at applying The Fraction Principle? Have you heard it work?

Resource: This is covered fully in Essentials In Worship in the *Complete Worship Leader Training Manual (page 38)* in the arranging and set-building section.



Bio: Dan Wilt, M.Min. is the creator of the Essentials In Worship Video Training Course for worship leaders and teams, and is the Founder of WorshipTraining.com, a media-training network of over 31K worship leaders and musicians. He serves as a worship leader in Franklin, TN, and has taught in Worship & Arts programs (for schools like St. Stephen's University and Indiana Wesleyan University). Dan is a songwriter, hymn writer, and author, and has served as a conference speaker in the UK, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, North America, Central, and South America. Dan works with his church family at Vineyard USA and Vineyard Worship in various support roles, and he, his wife Anita, and 3 young adult children live in Thompson's Station, TN. His ancient-future worship leadership blog offers weekly tools and team encouragements at DanWilt.com.