



Orchestra Auditions: Tips, tricks, and training

Auditions can be nerve-wracking for even the most accomplished musician: you're playing in a setting you never play in except for auditions, and the people listening are specifically there to judge your playing. If you learn to have fun while practicing for your audition, you might just have fun during the audition itself! MYS has written this brief pamphlet to help you prepare for the audition and minimize nervousness. While most of the information is directed specifically to MYS auditions, many of the techniques and suggestions apply to auditions you may encounter elsewhere. Remember, the MYS staff is here to support you. We want you to succeed!

Before your audition

Prepare, Prepare, Prepare! The best way to play confidently is to be well prepared. Start early by creating an audition strategy with specific goals and criteria. Make sure you focus on all aspects of the audition: scales and arpeggios, excerpts, solo piece, and sight-reading.

Scales and arpeggios:

If you don't already warm up daily with scales and their corresponding arpeggios, now is the time to start. Practice all the major and minor scales and arpeggios you need for your audition. Change it up by having someone select scales for you at random, or draw them out of a hat. Practice them at a variety of tempos, dynamics, and styles, and keep practicing until playing the scale is automatic. Practicing your scales can become like meditation and help you relax. Do

not neglect practicing scales and arpeggios while focusing on your excerpt and solo. Many students do well on those pieces but then stumble on scales. Scales show you have good technical mastery of your instrument.

Excerpts: If you are preparing more than one excerpt, always master the lower level excerpt before tackling the next level up. Excerpts are more than just notes and rhythms, the auditioners want to hear you play musically. To do so effectively, you first need to master the technical aspects of the piece. Begin by learning the excerpt slowly, making sure you are learning the correct notes and rhythm. This is also the best time find a few recordings of the piece to hear how the excerpt should sound in the context of the full piece. How are things phrased? What types of articulation are used? What are the dynamics? What other instruments are playing? Once you have learned the excerpt at a slower tempo, you are ready to apply some more advanced practice techniques to your routine. You could practice your excerpt in a different style, with different dynamics, or with a different tempo. Wind and brass players may also practice the excerpt in a different octave.

Your local library may have recordings, and you can check online sources like iTunes. Advanced players might want to use a score to find out what's going on in the rest of the orchestra during the excerpt.

Solo: Talk to your teacher! Work with them to select an appropriate piece. Look for something that stretches you a little technically and musically and that you have time to truly master before the audition. It is less about what you play and more about how well you play it. Keep in mind it is good to select a piece that will have

various tempo changes and dynamic contrast. If you select a piece that you love, then you will love practicing the piece! Practicing your solo is a great time to get experience playing in front of others, take advantage of that opportunity.

Sight-reading: Of course, you can't practice the actual piece you will sight-read, but you can practice sight-reading. Before attempting to sight-read a piece of music, you should take a moment to glance through the music, making note of the tempo, key signature, dynamics, and pitches, along with tricky rhythms or passages. To practice your sight-reading skills, try clapping the rhythms or naming the notes before playing, and be sure that you keep your eyes moving forward as you practice these skills. If the music looks particularly challenging, it is better to sight-read at a slower tempo!

In general: Relax! Be confident! Relaxation and confidence are skills you can practice and learn. Your mind and emotions are directly impacted by your body. Smiling and assuming a confident posture, even when you don't feel ecstatically happy or sure of yourself, can actually raise your confidence and lower anxiety. Assume a confident posture when you practice. Smile every time you pick up your instrument. **Use a metronome!** The fastest fingers in the world flying over your instrument don't mean much if the tempo is not correct and steady. Work new and complex rhythms with a metronome whenever you can.

Breathe! It may sound silly, but practice breathing. All musicians, not just brass and woodwinds, should learn proper breathing technique. In addition to helping you relax, proper breathing can improve tone quality, intonation, volume, flexibility, and stamina. Talk

to your teacher about resources for learning breathing techniques.

Practice doing well! It may seem odd, but simply thinking of yourself doing well at the audition actually improves your chances of doing well at the audition! Studies of pro-athletes have shown that visualizing success can increase the likelihood of succeeding.

Use your resources! Use your time with your teacher to work on audition material. Use your family and friends for mock auditions, complete with constructive criticism, playing suggestions ('Try it again, more legato'), and sight-reading. If you have access to recording hardware like M-Audio's "Microtrack 2," or even just an old tape-recorder then use it! Recording your practicing and listening to it can be enormously beneficial no matter what level you're at in your musical career. If you have access to rehearsal feedback software like "SmartMusic" then use that as well! Software like SmartMusic isn't as good as a live teacher, but you can use it every day and don't have to pay it by the hour.

The day of the audition

Sleep: A quick note on sleep: a consistent sleep schedule is one of the best ways to keep yourself feeling rested and refreshed. Try to establish a pattern weeks before the audition, and then stick to it.

Food and drink: Certain commonly consumed substances greatly impact the way your body and brain function. The effects of caffeine from coffee, tea, soda, or chocolate can escalate anxiety and increase unhelpful body reactions like rushing and shaking. Processed sugars tend to offer a very, very brief burst of energy, but the overall effect is depressive.

Because these and other substances like nicotine can be mentally or physically addictive, it's best to cut them out weeks ahead of your audition.

Walk in the door: Head to the audition with enough time beforehand to take care of any potential issues, like a car that won't start, rush-hour traffic, or a broken reed or string. Knowing you have enough lead-time to deal with problems will help you feel confident. Remember to assume a confident posture and a smile as you approach the building. Remember to breathe. When you arrive at your audition there will likely be other musicians around waiting for their auditions, but it is important to concentrate solely on your own audition. You have control over how you behave and how you play, so worrying about others' auditions has no point! Listening to other auditioners warm-up only leads to the comparison game, and that is counter-productive.

Warm-up: Note that we use the phrase "warm-up," not the word "practice." If you were going to compete in a 5k race, you probably wouldn't run the entire 5k course right before joining the crowd at the starting line. Likewise, frantically practicing everything that might happen in the audition is not a good way to use your final minutes before the audition. Breathe, and begin warming up as you normally do. Concentrate on your breathing and keeping things at an appropriate tempo. Slowly work your way to more technically challenging music, don't leap right into the hardest thing you play. Many people find it helpful to warm up on something completely different than their audition material, especially if it's something with which they are very confident.

Relax: A few minutes before your audition is scheduled, stop warming up and just relax. Use whatever relaxation methods work for you, whether it's visualization, reading a book, or simply breathing slowly for a few minutes. Collect your thoughts and concentrate on playing the best you can.

Audition: Remember your posture and your smile (and your instrument!), and walk in the door. Say hello! Remember to breathe, and remember to try and stay relaxed. It's common for people to speed up when they're excited or nervous, so keep an eye on your tempo. Play musically, put expression into your music. We're not looking for technically perfect but expressionless robots, we're looking for musicians. As you're playing, focus on your strengths, work to show those strengths to the conductor. If you are asked to repeat something or to play something a certain way, listen carefully to what is being asked and make sure you do it. If you don't understand the suggestion, ask for clarification. Do what is asked, even if it means changing something you've practiced. Remember, the MYS staff have been on the other side of many auditions. We know what it can feel like and we know how important it is to you. We truly want you to do your best. Prepare, prepare, prepare, and good luck!

Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment; full effort is full victory.

-Mahatma Gandhi

If you have any questions about the MYS audition process, please contact us at www.mnyouthsymphonies.org or 651.699.5811
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