



EASTMAN  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

# 5 STEPS TO AUDITIONING SUCCESS



Eastman School of Music Admissions Office



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# INTRODUCTION



Jamal J. Rossi  
Joan and Martin Messinger Dean  
Eastman School of Music

**“I’ve never  
known a  
musician  
who regretted  
being one.”**

Auditioning for entrance into a music school can be exciting, invigorating, and perhaps even slightly terrifying. Your best chance of achieving your personal goals will come from being well prepared, and from developing a positive attitude that embraces the opportunity to chart your future course.

The goal of this book is to provide you with a wealth of ideas that can help you prepare for a successful audition experience, reduce your stress, improve your performance, and reflect your best in auditions and interviews.

The American composer Virgil Thomson stated, “I’ve never known a musician who regretted being one.” Good luck to you in your future auditions and in all your musical endeavors! You are about to embark on a career path that will bring you unique opportunities and profound satisfaction.

Best wishes,  
Jamal J. Rossi  
Joan and Martin Messinger Dean  
Eastman School of Music

# 1 GETTING THERE



The first step to a great audition is getting there. You may have lots of travel coming up, or you may already have a few auditions under your belt, but these suggestions will help your audition travel to go more smoothly.

**Remember  
that the  
audition  
process  
is more like  
a marathon  
than a sprint.**

Educate yourself about the latest **rules and restrictions** for traveling with musical instruments, and know the specific policies for the airline you book. Arrive at the airport early to allow extra time for security screening. If you fly with a large instrument, you may need to purchase an extra seat for it. (One double bassist not only had to buy a seat for the instrument, but the only way he could fit the bass on board was by stowing it in the seat upside down!) Shipping your large instrument separately can also be an option as long as you have an extra secure shipping case, but many musicians find this nerve-wracking.

If you play **double bass, percussion, or harp**, be sure to check with the schools where you are audi- ▶

# 1 GETTING THERE

## Educate yourself about the latest rules and restrictions for traveling with musical instruments



tioning to find out what equipment they'll provide for you. You may not need to bring your own instrument to every audition. Playing an unfamiliar instrument may be a little bit uncomfortable at first, but it can be well worth the adjustment if it allows you to take an audition that you otherwise could not attend.

Musicians who play **medium-sized instruments such as guitar, violin, and viola** generally won't need to purchase a seat for your instrument for air travel. However, you will need to make sure you can secure a safe space for your instrument on board. Be in the boarding area early, and position yourself at the start of your boarding group as soon as it is called. Don't wait until the end of the boarding process, because all of the storage space on the plane may be filled. Boarding early ►

# 1 GETTING THERE

**Position yourself at the start of your boarding group as soon as it is called.**

can be difficult if you have a tight connection or experience delays. If you need help finding space for your instrument, ask a flight attendant.

Instrumentalists traveling **internationally** will want to be especially cautious if your instrument contains any rare or endangered materials such as ivory. Recent restrictions make it risky to travel with these materials, and they could be confiscated.

**Reed players** should know that reed knives are not permitted in your carry-on items on U.S. flights. Be sure that they are safely checked to avoid having them confiscated at the security checkpoint. If you play an instrument that is impacted by climates with a different altitude or humidity level than you are accustomed to, be sure to discuss the necessary precautions with your teacher. Bring along a wider-than-usual array of reeds to give yourself some options.

Regardless of the particular challenges of travel with your instrument, always strive to be patient and courteous to your fellow travelers and airline staff.



# BE PREPARED! AUDITIONING AT YOUR BEST

You may be waiting to hear whether you will be invited for auditions, or waiting for confirmation of your audition date. In the meantime, what can you do to ensure that you are ready to perform your best?

**Nothing will give you more confidence than feeling thoroughly prepared.**

**Know your audition repertoire very well.** This is self-evident, but it bears repeating. When you walk into an audition, there is nothing that will give you more confidence than feeling thoroughly prepared. Take a few minutes now to look back at all of your audition requirements for each upcoming audition to be sure you haven't overlooked any details, such as etudes, scales, memorization, or sight-reading. Avoid the unnecessary stress of being asked to play something you aren't ready for!

**Know what to expect.** Are you likely to perform your audition on a concert hall stage, in a studio, or in a classroom? Will there be one person listening, or several? Will it be like a lesson, or more of a mini-concert? Will your evaluators stop you and

# 2 BE PREPARED!



**Approach  
an audition  
as an  
opportunity  
to challenge  
yourself.**

ask you to try a passage differently? The answers to these questions will vary by instrument and by school, but having some idea of the audition setting can help you to be more prepared. You will also want to know what else you will be doing on the day of your audition; for example, you may have to take a diagnostic theory exam, and you will probably be scheduled for an interview.

**Take good care of yourself.** Get plenty of rest, drink plenty of water, and avoid caffeine (as much as possible) in the days before your audition. Wellness is fundamentally important for all musicians, and is especially critical for vocalists. You can't perform your best if you aren't feeling your best, and the stresses of audition travel and keeping up with schoolwork can make this a challenge. Once your audition date has been confirmed by the school's Admissions Office, arrange your travel plans carefully to avoid

# 2 BE PREPARED!

## **Perform your audition in a variety of situations.**



being unnecessarily exhausted or rushed when you arrive, even if it means staying over an extra night.

**Use visualization and mental rehearsal.** Creating a positive mental image of an audition can be a powerful preparation technique. Imagine yourself walking into the audition room, greeting those who will hear your audition, and performing each selection in order with musicality and precision. The goal here is to imagine the performance exactly as you would like it to go. The more detailed your mental picture is, the more it can help you to perform at your full potential. Doing this well requires discipline, just like any form of practice. You can also use mental practice time away from your instrument to help avoid overuse injuries, and to make the most of spare moments that would otherwise be wasted, such as waiting in line.

**Practice being nervous.** Perform your audition in a variety of situations, especially ones that put you under a bit of pressure. Even if you don't feel quite ready yet, perform your pieces for a group of friends. Schedule another run-through for someone you don't know as well, but whose playing you admire. Let your listeners know what kinds of feedback you are looking for: about musicality, stage presence, rhythmic accuracy, etc. At least one of

## 2 BE PREPARED!

these mock auditions should be performed in the clothes you plan to wear at the audition, so that you can test them for comfort.



Another method to simulate the effects of performing under pressure is to jog up and down a flight of stairs before playing or singing through your audition repertoire. This will elevate your heart rate, and make you short of breath. Also, try playing through your audition repertoire with minimal warm-up time in a room that is slightly cold. Create a variety of these mildly stressful situations for yourself, and then pay close attention to how you react in the moment. Some nervousness is to be expected at

# 2 BE PREPARED!

Know your audition repertoire very well.

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Know what to expect.

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Everyone wants you to perform your best.

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Schools are also “auditioning” for you

an audition, but you’ll be better prepared for a reaction like dry mouth or sweaty palms if you know to expect it and know how it will affect your playing. Demonstrate to yourself that you can manage these physical factors, and that they won’t throw you off. The more you practice performing under stressful situations, the less nervous you are likely to feel when your audition day arrives.

**Keep in mind: everyone wants you to perform your best.** The faculty members listening to your audition know what it is like to perform under pressure, and nothing will make them happier than to hear you play your best. Don’t be fooled into thinking that an audition is an adversarial situation where you are being harshly judged. Instead, approach it as an opportunity to challenge yourself and to learn something new that you can use in your next performance.

**Remember that schools are also “auditioning” for you.** During your audition day and other college visits, keep in mind that you are looking for the school that feels right to you. Does the school you are visiting offer the opportunities and atmosphere that you are seeking? Don’t focus so narrowly on the question of “Can I get in here?” that you neglect to ask yourself, “Is this a place where I can develop my talents?”

# 8 MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR AUDITION DAY

Visiting a college campus is a great way to get a more complete picture of what studying there would be like.



Remember: arrive with enough time to get lost. Beginning your audition day in a rush will really set the pace for the entire day. If convocation starts at 9:00 AM, make plans to arrive on campus at least 15 to 20 minutes before this first appointment. Once you have your audition day schedule, you should identify the location for each appointment and be early for these as well. College campuses can be very confusing to navigate (especially if you

# 3 YOUR AUDITION DAY

**Take advantage of scheduled and non-scheduled opportunities.**



have never visited), so don't hesitate to ask for help when trying to find your audition location.

Auditioning on campus can also be an opportunity to learn more about the school. Even if you have visited campus before, there are still ways to learn even more about the institution.

Take advantage of scheduled and non-scheduled opportunities. Many times there will be extra appointments scheduled into your audition day such as receptions, group meetings, and presentations. These are all scheduled for a reason and are meant to provide you with valuable information about the school. If it appears on your schedule: attend it. There might also be options for you to take a tour or add an informational session to your audition day. Look out for flyers and additional information at check-in.

**Talk to current students.** Spend some time in the cafeteria, local coffee shop, or any common areas where students gather. You may even be able to meet up with some of the students who play your instrument. Don't be shy—students are usually more than happy to meet fellow musicians and tell them about their school.

# 3 YOUR AUDITION DAY

Before you set out, **make a list of specific questions** you want to ask. Some topics you might want to learn more about include coursework, ensembles, student life, study abroad, dual degrees, and financial aid.

Want to pick up a **t-shirt or hoodie** from the colleges at which you audition? The campus bookstore is a great place to do this, but make sure to leave extra room in your suitcase for this purpose, or bring an extra bag!

After your audition, take some time to review your notes. Think about what you learned and whether the school feels like a good fit for you. Don't be shy about following up with any questions you still might have.

Admissions counselors are always happy to provide you more information.



# 4 UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL: HOW TO HAVE A GREAT INTERVIEW

Many of you will have an interview as part of your audition, conducted by a member of the school's faculty or staff—either individually or in small groups. Interviews create an opportunity for them to get to know you face-to-face in a more personal way.

**From now on you'll find many kindred spirits who care about music as much as you do.**

The best interviews are the ones that applicants approach with candor and an open mind, not a rehearsed spiel. The college will already have your resume on file, so reciting a list of your notable accomplishments isn't particularly useful. Interviewers are more interested in learning about what inspires you, what your goals are, and how you would fit in as a part of their community.

In group interviews, it can also be interesting for you to hear from other applicants who share similar goals, though their stories may be very different from your own. You may be one of the few serious musicians in your high school, but from now on you'll find many kindred spirits who care about music as much as you do. Your interview will be

# 4 UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

a unique experience shaped by you and the other participants. Sometimes interview groups are chatty and funny; sometimes they delve into serious topics like the future of music. You may even strike up new friendships during the course of an interview.



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Here are four ways to make your interview a good experience:

**1**

**Be yourself.**  
That's who they're interested in getting to know.

**2**

Plan at least **one or two questions** to ask your interviewer.

**3**

**Keep your ears open.** You never know what you might learn, or who you might meet!

**4**

**Dress professionally** for your interview, as you do for your audition.

# 5 AFTER YOUR AUDITION: FIVE THINGS TO DO WHILE WAITING FOR YOUR COLLEGE DECISIONS

*Congratulations—you survived your college auditions!*

You may feel like you've climbed Mount Everest, and that the hard part is over.

**Making each audition into a learning experience that will help you grow as a musician.**

However, waiting to receive your admissions decisions can be an even more difficult period. Here are five ways to make the most of the next phase of the admissions process.

**Take some time to think about each audition.** What went well, and what could have been better? What should you do differently in your practicing and preparations before your next important audition? By making each audition into a learning experience that will help you grow as a musician, you gain value from it no matter what the outcome.

**Don't be too hard on yourself.** This might sound contrary to the previous point, but it won't do any good to obsess over a mistake, whether big or small. ►

# 5 AFTER YOUR AUDITION

Musicians tend to be their own toughest critics. Keep a positive outlook, and take some time to celebrate all that you've accomplished thus far. Missing a note or two doesn't mean that you blew an audition completely. If you were already perfect, there would be no point in going to music school!

**Keep a positive outlook, and take some time to celebrate all that you've accomplished thus far.**



**Take on new musical challenges.** You've probably been so focused on your audition pieces that you are eager to set them aside for a while. Now is a great time to start new repertoire, change up your warm-up routine, and/or devote some extra time to practicing fundamentals. Set some new goals to accomplish before the summer is over. ►

# 5 AFTER YOUR AUDITION



**Stay focused on schoolwork.** Now is the time to catch up in the classes you missed during the audition season. Be sure to stay on top of your academics during the upcoming months, and don't give in to "senioritis." The school you attend in the fall will require a final transcript from your previous school, and you don't want any questions about a sudden downturn in grades.

**Re-connect with family and friends.** The spring and summer will go quickly, and next fall you may be far away from people you care about. Take the time to make some great memories with them now, and let them know how much you appreciate all the support and encouragement they have given you.



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# RESOURCES

- ▶ [Eastman School of Music](#)
- ▶ [Institute for Music Leadership](#)
- ▶ [E-Theory](#)
- ▶ [Speed Lessons](#)
- ▶ [Admissions Office web site](#)
- ▶ [ESM YouTube channel](#)
- ▶ [ESM Facebook page](#)

