

Suggestions for a Successful Audition, Jim Arnwine

with contributions from Kevin Brown, Jack Taylor, Jo Stoup, and Alyson McLamore

I have been asked to write a few thoughts about what adjudicators like and dislike about how students conduct themselves during auditions. I asked a number of musicians who actively audition students for honor groups, concerto performances and awards competitions for their thoughts. These comments concern the process of the audition only, not the musical criteria for an audition, and are equally important to the success of your audition.

1. Know the particular information about the group for which you are auditioning.
 - a) Check the dates of rehearsals and performances to make sure you will be able to participate if you are selected.
 - b) Do not audition for a group if you do not intend to participate.
 - i) You waste the time of many people when you are selected to be a member of an honor group and then do not participate. Not only do you waste the adjudicator's time but also that of the organizers of the ensemble who must then find replacements.
 - ii) Much worse are those who, rather than tell the organizers of the event that they will not participate, simply do not show up. This irresponsible behavior is a disservice to everyone involved, including other students, organizers, and conductors.
 - iii) If you are selected—and don't participate—you've taken the spot away from someone who would have dearly loved to have been accepted. This is selfish and thoughtless.
 - c) If a dire emergency forces your plans to change, contact the organizers at once.
2. Know what music to perform in each particular audition. Ask the following questions if you don't know the answers already:
 - a) What music is expected?
 - i) Often asked for are a prepared piece (solo or etude), two prepared pieces of contrasting character, or a mandatory selection.
 - ii) Don't play your particular part to a band or orchestra composition that you are playing in school
 - b) Should the music be memorized?
 - c) Is a piano accompaniment expected? If so, bring an accompanist with you. **[none required for honor groups]**
 - i) Be sure to arrange for your accompanist enough in advance that he/she can properly prepare for the audition.
 - ii) The accompanist should be performing from a published score, not a photocopy. Many organizations will not hear an audition if photocopied music is being used.
 - d) Bring a set of the music for the adjudicator.
 - e) Be prepared to play scales or exercises if asked.
3. Treat the audition process (and adjudicators) with respect.
 - a) Enter the room with your instrument assembled and ready to go.
 - b) Be polite and introduce yourself. Speak clearly and distinctly (don't mumble!) Many audition rooms have a lot of echo, and the adjudicator may find it hard to understand your speaking voice if you don't enunciate.
 - c) Do not act overly familiar or be too chatty; many students do so because of nerves.
 - d) Even if you are familiar with the adjudicator, treat him or her with the same respect you would any other judge.
 - e) Dress appropriately for an audition, not in jeans, shorts, or t-shirt. However, make sure you are physically comfortable in what you wear—nothing too tight, or short, or overly fancy. High heels can be problematic when you're nervous to begin with.
 - f) Be respectful of other auditioners; be quiet outside of the audition rooms.
4. Be prompt
 - a) Find the travel directions to the audition site in advance.
 - b) If you are travelling some distance, allow time for traffic. You may need to listen to traffic reports on the radio. It adds to your stress to arrive late—and, since participants in the ensemble need to arrive at rehearsals on time, you may hurt your chances of being accepted by showing up late at the audition itself.
 - c) Arrive early enough to:
 - i) find the site (especially important if the audition is on a large campus).
 - ii) check-in with the organizers.
 - iii) warm-up carefully—but don't play too much and tire yourself out. A foolish applicant "shows off" in the warm-up room, and then is worn out for the audition itself.
 - iv) be at the audition room for your particular instrument at least five minutes before your scheduled audition time.

Suggestions for a Successful Audition (*cont.*)

5. It is better to play an easier piece well than a difficult piece badly. Just because the piece you play is more advanced than that performed by others does not mean you will be selected over them.
6. In many, many instances, the adjudicator may cut you off before you have reached the end of your piece or etude. This is not an indication that you are playing poorly; it's often shows the desire to have you play varied examples in the limited time available for your audition. However, don't try to anticipate a "cut-off;" keep going (confidently!) until told to stop.
7. Do not apologize or give excuses for what you may feel is a poor performance (either before or after your audition). Show confidence and maturity. Everyone makes mistakes; not everyone is able to handle the errors professionally. It is to your advantage to display a good attitude; adjudicators often make a note of this on their comment sheets, and this opinion can tip the balance if your audition was on the borderline.
8. Do not end your audition by asking "How did I do?" or "Did I make it?" These decisions are made after all applicants have been heard. Instead, thank the adjudicator for his or her time and for giving you the opportunity to try out.
9. Please take the time to look around and make sure you've picked up all your belongings before leaving the audition room. Also, try not to carry off things that aren't yours—it is very easy to pick up sight-reading music, etc., by mistake.
10. Give yourself a pat on the back for being brave enough to audition. Playing "solo" requires courage, and you should be proud of yourself.