

IMEA All-District Audition Checklist for Success

2 Week Before

- All music is learned and can be played top to bottom
- Mock Auditions are scheduled with
 - At Least 1 Teacher
 - Parents
 - Aunts/Uncles
 - Grandparents
 - Dog/Cat/Fish/Pet
- Audition Day Outfit is Planned
 - Nice/Professional/Church Clothes Outfit
 - Boys-Tucked in shirt with belt
 - COMFORTABLE Shoes (girls, any sort of heel is discouraged)
- Daily Practice is scheduled
 - Alternate between doing "big picture" run-throughs or mock auditions and focused, detail work on one or two measures

1 Week Before

- Complete Mock Auditions
 - Wear the shoes you plan on wearing for the real audition
 - Do at least one audition in your audition outfit
- Stay on top of school work and get adequate rest every night.
- Establish, write down, and PRACTICE a 10-15 minute warm-up routine consisting of:
 - Long Tones
 - Lip Slurs
 - Scales
- Play Every Day, especially over weekends
 - Do not play for more than 40 minutes at a time
- Find some time to warm-up and play at 9am (similar to when the audition takes place) especially if you're not a morning person.
- Pick out an audition day breakfast that you can have every day leading up to the audition (consistency/nothing new on audition day)

The Day of the Audition

- Get plenty of rest and eat your consistent breakfast
- Hug Mom and Dad and tell them thank you for all their love and support
- Don't play the morning of the audition until you're there.

Things to Bring (everything should be clearly marked with your name)

- Instrument
- Spare Reeds/Valve Oil/Supplies
- Music
- Wire Music Stand for warming up in gym
- Water Bottle
- Light/healthy snacks
- Sweater or Jacket in case the audition building is cold
- Book, phone, something to occupy you so you don't have a mental freak out if you have to wait a while until your audition

Use These 7 Key Preparation Tips to Be More Successful at Your Next Audition

Are you familiar with the runner's adage "Nothing new on race day"? What exactly does this mean? It means making sure one has experimented with and practiced things like pre-race nutrition, in-race hydration, and warm-up routines, also ensuring that socks, shoes, shorts, and shirt are broken-in and not going to cause blisters or chafing.

Thankfully, chafing is not a concern for musicians, but the principle of "nothing new" is a sound one. It means setting up a series of mock auditions for yourself so that you have opportunities to rehearse all aspects of the audition process, from what you eat the day before, to what goes through your mind in the last few seconds before you play the first note.

1. Food

What are you going to eat the night before? The morning of? What are you going to drink? How much? If you are a regular coffee drinker, are you going to wean yourself off weeks ahead of your audition so you don't get caffeine withdrawal headaches? Plan all of this out and test it in advance, so that it is part of a familiar routine come audition day. You might find, for instance, that a big pasta dinner works better for you 2 nights before your audition, than the night before.

Keep in mind too that you will be out of town on audition day, and may not feel like dragging yourself around in the cold in a new neighborhood just to find your favorite strawberry fruit-on-the-bottom yogurt or cinnamon crunch bagel with low-fat hazelnut cream cheese shmear. Be sure to practice being somewhat flexible and adaptable in your preparation.

2. Clothing

Practice performing in the clothes you plan on wearing, even down to the socks and shoes you plan on wearing (this impacts pianists more than other instrumentalists, but still).

Here too, practice being somewhat flexible as well – you never know when the airline might misplace your luggage and your favorite heels, or lucky Spongebob Squarepants boxers.

3. Instrument

Run a few mock auditions on different pianos, a sub-par set of timpani, or a string slightly out of tune. Don't allow yourself to be thrown off even if the instruments aren't exactly to your liking.

4. Environment

Conduct your mock auditions in less than ideal environments. Try big rooms, small rooms, cold rooms, hot rooms, and rooms with acoustics of various types.

If at all possible, scope out the room you will be auditioning in the day before. Walk around in it, play a few notes if you can, and take a mental snapshot of the space so that you can mentally rehearse having a great audition in that space as part of your mental preparation the day before (or even earlier if you already are familiar with the space). This is actually a tremendously helpful thing to do — be resourceful and find a way to make it happen.

4. Warm-up routine

Have an established warm-up routine that you utilize every day. When I took martial arts classes in grad school, ritual and routine were part of our preparation for class. Unfolding the uniform, putting it on in a certain order, making sure everything was in order and tying everything together just so, bowing in, warming up, stretching, etc. all were part of the training experience.

It's the same thing for musicians. We all have a particular way of taking out our instrument, adjusting it, and getting it ready to play. We may have a stretching routine, or play scales, or slowly through the openings of our repertoire. Whatever it is, don't just go through the motions, but be mindful of the steps you take, seeing this as an important ritual that gets you into the right mindset for effective practicing or performing. Such a routine can become almost meditative, and is a valuable process for clearing your mind and getting mentally prepared to go train/practice/perform. Try it; you'll see what I mean.

5. Repertoire

Know what piece you want to start with, in the likely event that you are given a choice.

First impressions are key, and your jitters will likely be greatest before you begin playing, so practice the first line or two of each piece to death, making sure this is rock-solid and that you feel exceedingly comfortable with the very opening.

But also practice starting at other places in each piece, where the committee might reasonably have you start. Ask a friend to select random pieces from your list and have you start at reasonable starting locations that you are not accustomed to beginning with.

You never know what a committee will ask for, and while you can't possibly have everything prepared at the same high level, you can at least develop a comfort level with unpredictability, such that you aren't thrown off your game and mentally say "oh, crap" when asked to begin with the piece that you least expected them to ask for.

6. Pre-performance routine

Be sure to develop a mental routine to go through in the last few moments before you play – a routine which will help you eliminate distractions, clear your mind, and get you focused on the task at hand. Centering is one such pre-performance routine, and you can certainly experiment with and tweak it as needed to make it work for you. Even something as simple as hearing the first few measures vividly in your head before beginning can help to clear out extraneous mental chatter and set you up for a better opening.

Last, but not least...

7. Sleep

Think of all the practicing you are doing, and combine this with the other daily responsibilities and demands that life and school place on you. What is the result? Physical, mental, and emotional fatigue.

In a study of Stanford University athletes, researchers found that increasing sleep led to greater alertness and vigor (no surprise there), faster reaction times, greater accuracy, speed, and explosive power. In short, improved performance. Note that just a couple nights of good sleep won't cut it. Since most of us are operating on what sleep researchers call a sleep debt, you'll probably need at least several weeks of sleeping 9-10 hours a day in order to begin reaping the benefits. What? 10 hours? Sounds crazy, I know, but think about how much better you feel when you're well-rested vs. after a week of cramming for exams and all-nighters.

Can we play pretty darn well when we're sick or tired? Certainly. Michael Jordan demonstrated as much in his so-called "flu game." But it's awfully difficult, takes tremendous focus and will, and the level of performance we reach is not likely to be on par with our absolute best. Make things easier for yourself and just get more sleep. There will be plenty of time to catch up on re-runs of *The Office* after the audition...

The one-sentence summary

"Before anything else, preparation is the key to success." ~Alexander Graham Bell