

## **Trumpet Tips: Audition Success**

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Auditions can be a stressful event at any level. A friend of mine used to talk about how he enjoyed being retired from "competitive trumpet playing." For those in college or looking to get into a college program, though, it can seem like a never ending onslaught. Everyone handles audition stress differently. However, there are some ways that players can become more comfortable and confident in the situation. What follows will be a guide to help aspiring musicians who are wanting to audition to become music majors, as well as those students who are already there.

### **Musical Preparation**

The better you know your music, the more confident you will be. For those looking to get into college, that means choosing appropriate repertoire to audition on. Many schools have required lists of pieces. If you are not able to prepare those pieces, it is worth the time to contact the trumpet professor and ask if a piece you are more comfortable on is acceptable. Myself, as well as many trumpet professors I know would rather hear students perform the best example of themselves, rather than (unsuccessfully) attempt something too hard for them.

There are occasions, especially in college, when the audition material given out is required. In these instances, the music is usually excerpts, so try to find the source and learn what the larger piece sounds like. In both cases - your choice, or theirs - the fundamental element that everyone is listening for is the level of musicality. That is not to discount technical considerations, but the more musical, the better. Good technique is a great goal, but I have never known Clarke studies to be on an audition. Good technique needs to be subservient to great musicianship.

Listen to high quality examples of the music. Play along with them. Be able to sing the music in every detail. One major problem is relying on the trumpet to learn the music. The trumpet is a piece of brass tubing with three valves. The music that we attribute to it does not come from the trumpet, but from the individual. The performer's mental ear must be so strong, that nothing can distract them from their musical thoughts.

One of the benefits of this is that when thinking musical thoughts, we become less stressed. The body's reaction to a stressful situation like an audition is our basic fight or flight response. Demonstrating musical mastery triggers the body into the fight side. We breathe better (which feeds back on the calming thoughts), play with better dynamics, have better musical agility, and generally perform with more confidence. If we allow ourselves to doubt, whether because of poor preparation, poor musical goals, or a general sense of self-doubt, the "flight mode" will come out. This means poor breathing, more tension, flubbed fingers, and cracked notes, all of which feeds down a negative spiral.

The moral of the story here is to always focus on the music. Practice in a musical way so that it is the only way you will know when it comes time to perform in the audition. Proper full breaths not only help us play better, but serve to calm the body and focus the mind. The two most critical elements in performance, and auditions are a performance, are to hear the music we are playing and breathe to give the body and the trumpet the proper fuel to succeed.

### **Physical Preparation**

There are some ways to get the body to handle fight or flight better. The stress of the audition can sometimes be replicated, giving the opportunity to practice paying under stress ahead of time. One great exercise is to go run. It can be running up and down stairs, or running around the building. What is being done, is increasing the heart rate and accelerating the breath, similar to what happens when dealing with the flight response. Through practicing this simulated response, performers can develop the necessary coping mechanisms to overcome this challenge. Another excellent technique is to create distractions. This can be anything from practicing with the radio or television on, to actually having friends run around and try to distract you.

Endurance is sometimes a concern. This is typically not the case in an audition for college since those tend to be relatively short in duration. But, being able to perform your music through two times in a row can give extra confidence that endurance will not be a problem. Nerves can tend to shorten someone's normal endurance, so it is always good to know there is something in reserve.

Prepare how the audition is going to be. If it is going to be a standing audition, or you play better standing, practice that way. If people are going to be looking at you, try to have an audience so you become used to their eyes being upon you. Practice in the clothes you will perform in so you know you will be comfortable. If you never perform with a tie on and suddenly will be wearing one, it can create an unfamiliar experience, and all of this preparation is meant to avoid just that.

### **Miscellaneous Preparation**

When auditioning for college, it is best to dress nicely. It shows the people listening that you are taking things seriously and you value the opportunity being given. Have answers ready for some basic questions, such as, "Tell me about yourself," or "Tell me about what you want to do in music." There are really no right or wrong answers, merely they want to see if you have goals and what kind of person you are. Having answers ready demonstrates you have thought about this next step in life. Also, it is okay to ask questions. In some cases, it is good to have some questions. You might know the answers, but asking again shows a level of interest that people like to see.

Know your scales, arpeggios, and practice sight reading. Almost every college audition, whether admission, scholarship, or band placement requires scales. They are a fundamental building block of music an necessary to know in order to advance to a high level. They also

demonstrate the level of discipline someone has to be able to practice rudiments on a daily basis. Successful sight reading proves that you can do more than prepare a piece, but that you have a strong foundation to quickly learn the technique and more on the musical development.

These tips are just a few suggestions to help achieve success in auditions. Not every audition will go the way you want it to, but they can all be learning experiences. If each audition gets a little bit easier, then you will know you are on the right track. To paraphrase a popular expression, any audition you can walk away from is a good one.