

2008

A Student And Parent Guide To  
Auditions



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Wisconsin Music Teachers Association

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# A Student And Parent Guide To Auditions

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# A Student And Parent Guide To Auditions

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The Wisconsin Music Teachers Association  
an Affiliate of the Music Teachers National Association

Maybe your child wants the role as the butterfly in the next school play or aspires to be on the varsity cheerleading team, but no matter how you phrase it, these are all forms of an audition. If they were auditioning for a role in a play, the child may need to rehearse and perform various parts of the script for the director; if they were trying-out for cheerleading, they may need to demonstrate to the coach their ability for a position on the team. Each of those 'auditions' requires advance preparation and has some type of expectations. Over the course of their adult lives, they will have to audition for colleges, jobs, promotions, and even spouses.

Now the questions, what is a music audition? What exactly goes on at the audition? By this time, your mind is set into motion, and you have a million questions, but may be afraid to ask the teacher. If you are a parent or guardian, suddenly thrust with a bubbling child exclaiming, "*My teacher says I'm going to be playing in an audition!*" We hope this page may address most of your questions about auditions. However, if after reading this your questions are still unanswered, please consult your teacher, or send us a note. At WMTA, we are here to help.

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## THE ADVANTAGES ABOUT AUDITIONS

There are many positive advantages to participating in auditions. Students who perform in auditions regularly generally work harder on their lesson assignments (and thus become better musicians) when they have a deadline and a goal. I compare music lessons without auditions or recital opportunities to that poor hamster running on the wheel in his cage. He just keeps going in circles, but never gets anywhere. When students just go to their lesson once a week and keep playing the same thing, this leads to frustration and boredom.

Students learn what it takes to perform under pressure. This can be a very valuable tool when they must complete a task by the deadline for work or school. They will be performing usually in an unfamiliar setting and sometimes on an unfamiliar instrument. This experience helps them to adjust the playing to different conditions. I cannot count how many times my students have said, "*I played it better at home*".

Students get a chance to have their performance evaluated by a master in their field. They gain self-esteem, self-confidence from positive feedback from the judge. Sometimes a judge can provide another way of solving a musical problem that the teacher and student hadn't examined. The students get to meet others who share their interests and goals. At their private lesson, sometimes a student can feel like, "*I'm the only one sitting here playing scales while my friends are having fun*". But in the audition setting, they will encounter other kids their age who value music study highly and are willing to devote the long hours it takes to participate in a competition.

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## TYPES OF AUDITIONS

Auditions may also be called, competitions, festivals, examinations, and are based strictly on performance. **Wisconsin Music Teachers Association's Statement of Purpose** asserts: *"these auditions provide students an opportunity to receive an evaluation of their performance and musicianship skills. The judging critiques benefit teachers by showing the effectiveness of their studio techniques and encouraging them to seek ways to develop a comprehensive music curriculum."*

All auditions have an entry deadline and usually a nonrefundable entry fee. This fee covers the cost of procuring judges, prizes, site rental, piano tuning, etc. Once the student has submitted your application and fee, they are registered to participate. If, for whatever reason you have to cancel, please contact your teacher.

Some auditions separate students by age or instrument, while other more low-key auditions may not have this requirement. At WMTA District Auditions, there are four different levels of performance, with different requirements. **DISTRICT 2** participants in grades 1-6 perform two memorized compositions (of a contrasting nature), with participants in grades 7-12 performing two compositions from different style periods. **DISTRICT 3** level is open to students in grades 7-12 whereupon they perform three compositions (from different style periods), two from memory and one with the music (each piece must be at least 16 measures long). **DISTRICT 2NM** level is geared to the busy senior high school student whereupon they perform two compositions (from contrasting style periods) with music (two original copies necessary). The **STATE level** auditions require the student to perform three compositions, each from a different historical style period, including at least one Baroque or Classical composition. At some auditions, students may perform in solo or in ensemble groups (such as Solo & Ensemble competition, held in school districts).

Some auditions also require students to take a written exam. These are usually music theory exams, but can include ear-training, music history, or a written essay. At WMTA District Auditions, each student is required to take a written and aural musicianship test. For young students, the teacher must ascertain whether the student will be able to read and understand the test questions. Do not be upset if your child is not entered in a competition for this reason. The musicianship test syllabus contains the basic fundamentals necessary to becoming a well-rounded performer. There are eight levels of the musicianship test, which the teacher will determine which level is suitable for the student. All STATE level students must follow the minimum test requirements and score 80% or higher to be eligible for the Badger Competition. Your teacher has a list of the required material for each level test.

The WMTA Auditions are designed for all students in grades 1-adult, not merely the more talented and advanced students. The WMTA Auditions are designed to be a positive learning experience for all, no matter what ratings are achieved. Remember too, even the best student need suggestions and inspiration for future development.

For the student who may be interested in taking the more serious route, the WMTA State Performance Competitions may expose them to these kinds of experiences. Who are the Competitions for? Any young musician who seeks to have an opportunity to be receive comments on their performance from at least one judge and who wants not only to compete against other musicians but have the opportunity to hear some of the best young talents in their age bracket in the state. These competitions (open for all solo instruments, voice) are for the more serious student, with competitions at the [Junior High](#), [Senior High](#),

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[WMTA Young Artist](#), [WMTA Badger Collegiate](#), [MTNA Collegiate and Chamber Music](#) level. Some of these competitions select a winner from each state who advances on to the divisional and national competition for cash and other prizes. For the budding composer, WMTA/MTNA also has a [student composition competition](#) (for elementary-college level students). For more information regarding these competitions, please visit their respective web pages.

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## STUDENT PREPARATION

After the months of practicing the audition literature, the big day approaches. What can the student do to ensure their best performance?

As soon as your child demonstrates interest in the audition, encourage them to adequately prepare. Many times students will postpone serious audition work or theory study until the last minute. Frequently the student may need to devote extra practice time for the audition literature. Memorizing music takes several weeks or months, to make sure that memory is solid. Much the same way as an athlete practice drills daily, the musician may need to repeatedly play portions of the same piece. While it may get on a parent's frazzled nerves, remember to maintain a positive attitude.

The teacher, student and parents may find it helpful to attend public portions of an audition a year before the student enters. Although the judges and entrants will not be the same, you can get a feel for the competition; listen to the level of playing.

On the night prior to the audition, it is imperative that the student gets a good night's rest. That means no slumber parties, camp outs, field trips, or all night horror movies! Relax on the morning of the audition; there is no need to spend countless hours on last minute cramming. At this point, the student will not need the additional pressure of repetitive practicing.

Most teachers will make recommendations on appropriate performance attire prior to the audition. The student should consider this a serious occasion; attire selected will also indicate to the judge that you respect this event and take your music-making seriously. Recommended performance attire would be: girls in dresses or dress slacks and comfortable, low heel shoes; boys in slacks and dress shirts (ties are optional), clean shoes. **Good grooming is a must:** clean hands, short nails (no nail polish), long hair pulled back, minimal jewelry., Attire that students should NOT wear include: miniskirts (or dresses) or extremely low rise pants, flip flops, ultra baggy pants (with boxer shorts exposed), t-shirts, bathing suits, shorts, sweat suits, baseball uniforms, football jerseys, denim jeans, snow boots, baseball caps, crop tops, halter tops--the midriff should not be exposed. No gum chewing, eating of lollipops or hard candy. The student's attitude is also important--going in to the audition feeling confident, poised and relaxed can help with your performance.

Our goal is to keep the stress level at a minimum. Parents can help by providing encouragement (when necessary), maintain a positive attitude (regardless the outcome) and keep the student relaxed.

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## PERFORMANCE REPERTOIRE

At large competitions (like MTNA Performance Competition); there are specific repertoire and time requirements. Students prepare literature selected from a list of acceptable pieces and play before a judge or panel of judges who award points of excellence.

For WMTA District Auditions and Badger Competitions, there is a composer list that the teacher must base the student's performance selections. Some auditions exclude simplified versions, sometimes referred to as "Made Easy for Piano". Others may require the music be written specifically for that instrument (a Beethoven Symphony performed on harmonica will not be accepted!). Low key auditions leave literature selection at the discretion of the contestant and teacher, while others can be built around a theme (Bach Festival, etc.). At Solo and Ensemble competition, there are required compositions in three grade categories (based on difficulty) that the teacher must use when selecting appropriate repertoire. Occasionally some festivals may require a student to provide an introduction to their piece—this may include their name, name of teacher, school, and an interesting aspect of the composition. Be sure to consult with your teacher to be well informed.

Once you and your teacher have chosen appropriate audition repertoire, then begins the hard work. The teacher's curriculum should reflect time in each lesson to prepare audition music, coach the students on audition etiquette, assist with entry forms, discuss judging procedures, and to discuss with both the parent and student how you feel about their performance results. For many auditions, it is not uncommon to study the repertoire for several weeks and even months. All the fine details of the piece need to be fully developed, much like a painter putting the finishing touches on his masterpiece! In some competitions, students perform at different 'stages', whereupon once they audition and win at the local level, they then advance to the state level (and must compete again at a later date). Sometimes they will end up playing the same audition pieces for more than a year. So, do not be discouraged if your teacher keeps assigning those audition songs to polish.

## WHAT HAPPENS AT AN AUDITION?

This too can vary from one event to the next. For example, at most auditions, the student brings their original audition selections and performs them for a judge. Some auditions are open, which means there may be an audience listening to your performance. DISTRICT level auditions are closed to the public, only the student and judge are permitted in the room. Closed auditions benefit the student by establishing a quiet environment (very similar to their private lessons) ensure good concentration and performance. WMTA STATE TRACK auditions are open to the public, providing the audition room has ample space. By contrast, most solo and ensemble auditions are open to the public.

Some auditions may only have one judge, while other more prestigious competitions will have what is known as a jury. Quite frequently many young students perceive the judge as someone "with a long black robe and gavel". Contrary to their perception, the judges (or jury panel) are professional musicians and college faculty. For example, if you are auditioning on Bassoon, your judge will be an expert on your instrument. Most associations have a list of qualified judges (and some have to complete adjudicator training programs) they use for auditions. **At WMTA, the role of the WMTA judge is to nurture musical talent. The WMTA judge works in concert with the teacher and parents in this important task.**

At WMTA Auditions, there are 16 districts that hold annual auditions from mid-February through early April. Teachers must submit students in their home district. Occasionally a conflict may arise with a

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vacation or other special event, in which case, the teacher may request from the district chair to move their student's audition to another district. WMTA BADGER Keyboard Competition is only held at three sites on the third Saturday of May. The WMTA Badger Instrumental/Vocal Competition is held on the second Saturday in May at UW-Marshfield. For specific sites for other competitions, please consult their specific web page.

It is a good idea not to schedule any other events on the day of the audition. Once the schedule is completed, no changes will be made. Because of scheduling constraints, audition chairpersons are usually unable to switch audition times to accommodate other activities.

Make sure that you give yourself plenty of time to find audition site. Upon entering the location, pinpoint the registration desk. Be sure that you bring the original audition pieces with the measures numbered. It is preferred that the music be free of excessive doodling or teaching comments. Because of copyright laws, photocopies are not acceptable at auditions, and may result in disqualification.

The personnel at the desk will direct you to your audition room location and practice rooms available. Sometimes cancellations do arise, so be prepared to play ahead of your scheduled time. At most auditions, there are monitors positioned at each site. Their role is to check in performers, make sure the judge adheres to the time frame, make sure each student has their music, and keep the hallway noise to a minimum. The monitor will introduce each performer and their music to the judge. Room monitors may instruct the student to adjust the instrument to their personal preference and to warm-up. **TAKE THE TIME TO WARM UP!** That means to play technical exercises, at different dynamic levels, that encompass the entire range of your solos. If you are using pedals, check to make sure these work too (if you do not know a warm-up exercise, ask your teacher). The judge will indicate when they're ready for the student to begin. Audition time guidelines for WMTA auditions range from DISTRICT 2 grades 1-6, 8 minutes to STATE TRACK grades 10-12, 15 minutes. Most auditions prohibit taping of any kind; once again this could cause distractions to both the student and judge. Generally, parents and other family members are not permitted to confer with the judges, or disrupt the audition in any way.

At WMTA Auditions, once you have completed your performance portion of the audition, you progress on to take the musicianship test. This is not a timed test; students will have ample time to complete this two-page test. Again, only the student and testing room personnel are allowed in the room. The student must be able to complete this test on his or her own.

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### HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR THE WRITTEN THEORY TEST?

The material for the musicianship test is not a complete listing of what a music student needs to know, and will not reflect every teacher's priorities and organization. But it is hoped that most teachers will regard these as reasonable, basic expectations for the various levels and that the students can be helped to build on their foundations each successful year of study. Teachers are expected to regard the learning of theory and music history as tools to make the study of music more comprehensive. While the isolated facts can be memorized for a test and quickly forgotten, the student who is constantly made aware of their application to the music will begin to use the materials in a way which will be reflected in his or her solid musical understanding and result in a sensitive performance. A student entered in DISTRICT 2 or DISTRICT 3 auditions should take a test appropriate to his or her level of skill as determined by his or her teacher upon consulting the test level information outlined in the WMTA Audition handbook. For students entered in DISTRICT 2 or DISTRICT 3 auditions, the test level is in no way indicative to the school grade level, but should be chosen strictly on the basis of the student's level of musical advancement. All students must progress to the next test level when they have scored 90% or above for

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two successive years. There are specific MINIMUM test requirements for students entering STATE auditions.

Many method books have excellent supplemental theory workbooks. The core concepts covered in these books are the bulk of the material incorporated in WMTA musicianship tests. If your teacher is not currently including basic theory work in your weekly lessons, ask him or her to recommend an appropriate book. While WMTA does not provide 'practice test' or worksheets to students or teachers, we can recommend a few excellent theory resources/study guides for students:

1. Faber Piano Adventures Course--Theory Book level Primer-Six, FJH Music
2. Fundamentals of Piano Theory, Keith Snell--Levels Prep-10, Kjos Piano Library
3. Alfred's Basic Piano Library, Activities & Ear Training (levels Prep A-F, Basic 1 through 6), Note speller, Theory (Prep A-F, Basic 1-6)

Moreover, the material covered on the WMTA tests also incorporate the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Proficiency Guidelines for Music Education.

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## WHAT ARE THE JUDGES LOOKING FOR?

As mentioned previously, the judges will be providing specific, honest, and constructive criticism, but also - and equally important - through positive reinforcement and an appreciative (and supportive) attitude. At WMTA Auditions, the judge bases their score on its term of evident preparation and musical communication, not by comparing one student's performance to the next. The judge tries to use language that is meaningful to the student as well as the teacher.

The judge will support their numerical rating with comments. They will try to balance the positives and negatives.

Because the judge is also a music educator and musician, they will be looking for ways to encourage the student's growth from the preparations for auditions as well as from a specific performance itself.

Here are just a few of the things the judge may be listening and watching for:

<i>following the guidelines</i>	<i>appropriate selection of literature</i>	<i>complete and accurate application of: notes, rests, counting</i>	<i>balance between hands and among the voices in one hand</i>
<i>dynamic shading</i>	<i>appropriate tempo</i>	<i>phrasing</i>	<i>proper ornamentation</i>
<i>pedaling</i>	<i>articulation</i>	<i>correct fingering and hand placement</i>	<i>body posture</i>
<i>dynamics</i>	<i>overall effect technique</i>		

As you can see, the judge evaluates mostly basic fundamentals of a student's musical study, which is a normal part of each lesson.

At WMTA auditions, the judge takes into consideration that the student may be tense and nervous. They realize that memory lapses and slips can occur. The most important thing the student can do is to demonstrate to the judge that they can perform the piece without stopping!



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At the WMTA DISTRICT level, each performance piece will receive a score from 1-5 (5 being the highest). A '5' would indicate special musical projection along with a control of musical and technical details (5's are awarded when a student goes beyond the notes and rhythms and other indication on the score and applies his own personality and musicality to the composition). If a norm can be determined, it could be a '4' rating, whereupon those students who play with essentially accurate rhythm and pitches and with some attention to the score for musical details (dynamics, tempo). By contrast, at Solo and Ensemble competition, students receive a score with a 1 or 1 star being highest. Consult your teacher to find out exactly how scoring is done for your specific audition.

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## AUDITION RESULTS AND AWARDS

Some low-key auditions are able to post audition results. Larger auditions may not be able to post auditions due to scoring tabulation. At WMTA District Auditions, performance and theory results must be tallied, and because the student accumulates points for awards, they must be recorded prior to release. At Badger Auditions, room results are posted at the conclusion of auditions. Because the record keeping personnel would like to be as accurate as possible, please be patient when awaiting results. All judging forms and test scores are returned to the student's teacher. At the student's next lesson, the teacher and student discuss the results.

For WMTA District Auditions, each audition piece can receive a total of five points, and the musicianship test can also earn up to five points. So, if a student is auditioning at the DISTRICT 2 level, the maximum number of points they can earn is 15 points. For those students auditioning at the STATE level, the maximum number of points they can earn is 20, and to be able to advance to the Badger Competition, they must earn at least 14 points on their audition and 4 points on the musicianship test.

Students who advance to the BADGER Competition in May must perform the same three compositions (there is no written test at this level). Each student will earn additional ten WMTA points just for their participation. Performers will be separated by instrument category and by school grade. Each participant will receive the judge's comments and a certificate of participation. A winner is chosen from each room, and they receive a trophy and additional five WMTA points. Runner-Ups and Honorable Mentions may be selected at the discretion of the judge. There is a winner's recital at the conclusion of the event and photographs of Winners, Runner-Ups and Honorable Mentions are taken for publication in the WMTA Newsletter and on the web site.

Regardless of the audition outcome or prize, every teacher I know is just proud that their student participated in any audition. The process is important, not the winning. But, if you still need that extra, there are various prizes awarded at competitions. Prizes may be scholarships, cash awards, trophies, or opportunities to perform in recitals, perhaps with an orchestra. At Solo and Ensemble competition students earn medals. At WMTA Auditions, students receive both a certificate and participate and accumulate points towards the following plaques and bars:

<b>POINT TOTAL</b>	<b>TYPE OF AWARD</b>
<b>22 points</b>	WMTA Award Plaque
<b>50 &amp; 75 points</b>	A bar to be attached to the 22-point plaque
<b>100 points</b>	A special 100-point plaque inscribed with student's name
<b>125, 150, 175 points</b>	Barbs to be attached to the 100-point plaque
<b>200 points+</b>	Additional plaques and bars will be awarded

*That way, no matter the outcome, you can earn a great reward!*

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### NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF AUDITIONS

We will not gloss over auditions and encourage them for every student. Auditions can be very stressful; students do not always need more anxiety in their daily lives. Those students who cannot function well under pressure and who do poorly are crushed; some even stop music study. Some students dislike having their names and results posted for public comparison. However, at WMTA auditions, our goal is to support the student, and therefore the WMTA teacher will evaluate whether it is feasible to enter his or her student. Parents and teachers can assist by providing positive feedback regarding the student's performance (regardless of the outcome), for this is just one brief moment of their musical lives.

We hope that you have found this helpful in guiding you and your child through the audition process. Remember, at WMTA we are here to help provide assistance, nurture and guidance to our musicians. *They are our future.*