

Making the most of your audition

The purpose of the audition

A key part of the process of applying for admission to a conservatoire is the audition

The audition procedure is designed to enable a conservatoire to find out about you, not just how accomplished you are, but what sort of a person you are. They want to assess whether you have the potential to be the sort of music, dance, drama, screen or production student who will benefit from the approach of the conservatoire, and to give you the chance to demonstrate your performance skills in support of your application.

It is also an opportunity for you to find out more about the conservatoire and experience its atmosphere, either for the first time

or under a new set of conditions. It is important that you try to get a feel for the place, to see if it fits with your own personal attitude, learning style and personality, and that you gather as much information as possible about the course to which you are applying.

So the audition is a two-way process – the conservatoire auditions you and you audition the conservatoire!

The conservatoire will aim to provide a positive and friendly atmosphere for the audition, enabling you to perform to your best ability, and to enjoy the process.



What the audition involves

Each conservatoire conducts auditions in a slightly different way, but here we give some basic advice for the core disciplines offered.

Music applicants

Auditions usually include a practical element – when you will be asked to perform two or more contrasting pieces you have prepared in advance – and an interview, during which you will have an opportunity to ask questions. The pieces may be prescribed, chosen from a list, or your own choice. Detailed advice on what your audition will cover will be provided by the individual conservatoire once you have been invited to audition.

In some cases an audition may have two parts, both held on the same day. In these cases, everyone takes part in round one, and then a limited number of candidates are selected to go forward to round two.

Composers and applicants in other non-performance areas are usually asked to submit a portfolio, video or other evidence of practical ability in lieu of an audition.

Dance and drama applicants

For dance and drama auditions, you may be asked to prepare monologues, a performance piece, participate in a dance class, sing, sight-read text, or improvise.

For drama production courses, you will be given set tasks prior to your interview and the interview will be an opportunity to discuss the tasks, your understanding of the course, and your career aspirations, amongst other things.

In some cases an audition may include a recall. Please check with the conservatoire(s) to which you are applying.

When are auditions held?

Most music auditions take place between mid-October and mid-December. Sometimes a conservatoire will hold a second set of auditions for late applicants, but you should try to attend during a conservatoire's main audition period, because places can fill up quickly and not all instruments/areas may be offered at late auditions.

Dance and drama auditions are usually held at different times of the year from music auditions. Please contact the conservatoire direct regarding audition dates for dance and drama.

Some conservatoires may offer international applicants the chance to audition at an overseas audition centre. These auditions may be offered at a different time of year, so you should check with the conservatoire in question for details.

How long will the interview/audition last?

This will vary from one conservatoire to another, but generally speaking, you can expect the audition itself to last 10-30 minutes. If an interview or additional tests (eg aural tests, written paper) form part of the audition process, these will add to the overall length.

Will there be an interview?

The audition will normally include an interview where you will be asked to talk about your musical, dance, drama, screen or production interests and activities, your artistic influences, what inspires you, your reasons for wanting to study at a conservatoire and this conservatoire in particular, and your career objectives.



You may also be asked to talk about your non-discipline-specific interests.

The interview may include discussion of the repertoire you have performed, in regard to preparation, challenges, technique, style, etc.

You may be asked to analyse and assess your performance with questions such as: What do you think you need to do next with your performance? What are your technical strengths and weaknesses? How much practice and preparation do you do?

Composers will be asked to present and discuss the portfolio of works they have submitted.

The interview is also an opportunity for you to ask the panel questions about the department and what life will be like as a conservatoire student.

Preparing yourself for your audition

There are many things you can do to prepare for your audition, so that you feel as confident and relaxed as possible on the day. Here are some suggestions.

- If you are a performer, practise the set or chosen pieces until you can perform them with confidence and authority.
- Take advantage of any opportunities to perform in public or in front of other performers to gain experience and confidence in performing under pressure.
- For music applicants, practice with an accompanist as often as possible before the audition.
- Have a practice audition, if these are offered, or stage one with friends and family or through your teacher.
- Research the pieces that you will be performing so that you will be able to talk about them in an informed way and answer any questions. Knowledge of professional recordings, the composer or writer, special features of the piece, great performers, etc, may all be relevant in an audition situation.
- Be prepared to talk about your wider interests (performances undertaken, projects, collaborations with other performers) and live performances you have seen.
- Think about the questions you are likely to be asked at interview (see above), and make sure you are able both to present your ideas confidently and coherently and to show your initiative and commitment to what you do.

- Think about what you want to know about the conservatoire and make a list of questions that you would like to ask.
- Talk to your teacher.
- Practise relaxation and breathing techniques to help manage nerves and make them work to your advantage on the day.

Making the most of the day itself

Remember that you are presenting yourself as a potential student. Arriving on time and being prepared for your audition will help you both to make a good impression and to feel relaxed.

Wear something that is smart but comfortable to perform or interview in, that will not restrict your movements when performing, and will not distract from your performance or interview.

The audition panel will be looking for good technical control, accurate intonation and rhythmic awareness in your performance; in the case of jazz candidates, some ability to improvise will be wanted but overall they will be judging your potential rather than your ability to give a flawless performance. They will also be assessing your attitude and potential and trying to form an overall picture of you as a person.



If your audition includes an interview, don't feel you have to live up to a certain image – just be yourself, be honest about your aspirations and how you hope a conservatoire course will help you achieve those goals.

Try to use your time visiting the conservatoire to get an impression of what it would be like to study there. What does your gut feeling tell you when you walk through the door? Is it easy to find your way around? Are there enough people around to help you if you are lost and are they friendly? What do the students seem to be doing?

Take some time to look at the facilities available to you at the conservatoire, including the halls of residence, practice rooms, performance spaces, communal areas, etc. Some conservatoires offer tours of the facilities as part of the audition experience, but if not, try to follow up or precede your audition by attending an open day at the conservatoire. This will give you an idea of the standard of students already at the conservatoire and a chance to speak to current students and course tutors.

And don't forget to be nice to your fellow applicants, the ushers and the current students you meet when you go to an audition, because one day you might find yourself sitting next to them at a rehearsal or costume fitting!

What happens afterwards?

Most conservatoires will try to respond to candidates within three to four weeks following the audition, and, at that point, will give you further information on what to do next.

It is very common to walk out of an audition or an interview and immediately think of something you should have asked. If this happens to you, don't panic, and don't be afraid to get in touch with the conservatoire to ask those questions. Admissions offices are there to help applicants throughout the application process and will respond to your queries as soon as they can.

Remember ...

- From practising to printing out instructions, preparing well in advance will help you to be relaxed on the day.
- The conservatoire wants you to succeed as much as you do, so stay positive and try to enjoy yourself.
- The audition and/or interview is your chance to ask questions about the course or department in which you have applied to study. Come prepared with a few questions.
- Be yourself – your ability, attitude and ambition are what count.

