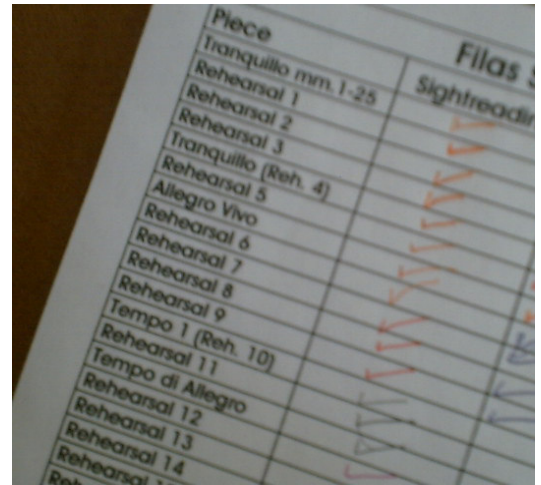


Win Music Auditions with Planning - Using a Practice Planner to Prepare Your Audition Piece

by Christina Thompson

Want to play your best at your next audition? One path to audition success is making sure you learn your audition piece thoroughly. Taking the time to gain a thorough understanding of your piece not only ensures that you're prepared, but also helps you feel more confident and relaxed during the audition. Here, you'll learn how to create a practice planner to help you organize your practice and master all the details of your audition piece--details your competitors may miss!



What is a practice planner?

A practice planner is a simple chart that lists each section of your piece along with tasks to help you learn each section thoroughly. Many people make the mistake of trying to learn an entire piece at once, and end up feeling overwhelmed. A practice planner keeps you out of this habit by asking you to break the piece into smaller, more manageable sections. Working with these small sections helps you stay focused, and using the tasks on the planner shows you exactly what you need to do to make every section better.

How To Make A Practice Planner

To begin making your practice planner, look over your audition piece to get a sense of how it goes. Then, start breaking the piece into smaller chunks. You can simply break your piece into 4-measure slices, or divide it up into A sections and B sections according to the form. You may want to divide your piece into unequal sections according to the notes and rhythms you find; for example, two measures of difficult sixteenth note runs can be a section, and eight measures of easier rhythms can be a section as well. It's up to you how long or short each section is--just make sure you divide the piece in a way that makes sense for you.

As you divide up your piece, write the measure numbers for each section vertically down the left side of a piece of paper. Across the top of the page, write your tasks--the different things you need to do in order to work up your piece. Some sample tasks are:

Sightreading - Play straight through the section and get a sense of how it goes.

Basics - Learn notes and rhythms; add basic dynamics and articulations.

Fine-Tuning - Polish dynamics and articulations, fix tempos, and make it stylish!

Memorizing - Even if it isn't required, memorizing can ensure that you know your piece well.

Dress Rehearsals - Play through the entire piece in front of other people.

Ready - Celebrate your accomplishments!

When you're done writing your measure numbers and tasks, draw lines across and down the page to make a chart with boxes you can check off. Now your planner is ready for action!

How To Use Your Practice Planner

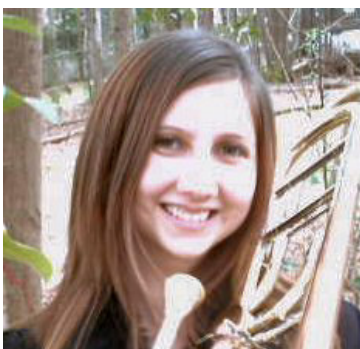
Now that you've created your planner, use it regularly to help you work on each section of your piece until it's completely prepared. Start by picking one section and focusing on a specific task; for example, working on Basics in measures 5-8. When you've mastered the task, check off its box. Make sure you go in order--memorizing the piece won't work if you haven't mastered the notes and rhythms!

Each day, review your planner and set goals for your practice. Is there a task that is almost ready to be checked off? If so, make that the main goal of your practice session, pinpointing and fixing the problems so you can earn your check. Setting small goals like, "I will check off the Basics box for measures 20-28," can help focus your practice and lead to big improvements over time.

Even though working on individual boxes will help you focus on specific sections, it's important to play larger sections of the piece as well. Once you check off a task for two neighboring sections, try playing both sections together. Work on playing both sections until it feels easy and sounds good, and then add more sections. Sometimes, it's a good idea simply to play through your entire piece, even if it's not all ready, to gauge your progress. After you play, always take a moment to reflect on how you played. If problems crop up that weren't there before, isolate and work on them until you're able to play your entire piece beautifully.

When you arrive at the "Dress Rehearsals" box, make the effort to go out and play your piece for an audience. The more you play in front of other people, the less intimidating it will be to perform for a judge. Playing for family and friends also helps you uncover trouble spots--parts of your music you don't know as well as you thought you did, or areas where you tend to feel nervous. By performing for an audience, you'll be able to identify weak spots, gain valuable performance experience, and calm your nerves before audition day arrives.

Creating a practice planner takes some extra time up front, but it can take your audition preparation to the next level. When you can see exactly how much progress you're making on your piece, it's easier to hammer out rough spots and prepare your piece more thoroughly. Try working with a practice planner today, and you'll hear the difference in the audition room!



Christina Thompson is a professional trombonist and music educator living in Raleigh, North Carolina. Christina is dedicated to helping trombonists of all ages discover, develop, and enjoy their signature musical sound in a positive, healthy environment. For more information, please visit <http://www.summerglen-music.com>.