

15 Things You Should Do If You Want to Be a Music Major

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College readiness is a huge focus for many high schools across America. AP Exams and dual credit classes have never been more popular. Unfortunately for the more musically inclined among us, high school counselors are not always prepared to guide young musicians in preparation for entrance into an undergraduate music degree. These are 15 things I wish someone had told me to do to prepare before starting my Bachelor's at Eastman. They will help you grow into a stronger musician as well as help you make sure music is truly the carrier for you.

1. Take Private lessons

Lessons are a must if you want to be exposed to the life and skills of a real carrier musician. Make sure your teacher has your private instructor should be qualified to teach a serious young musician. An ideal pre-college teacher has:

A degree in music, at least a Bachelor's Degree.

Experience in training college-bound musicians

Experience as an outstanding/professional performer

An instructor who doesn't possess these qualities is almost certainly not a good choice of mentor to prepare you for a college music program.

To find a good teacher you can contact students who are currently in the program you would like to enter and ask around. You may even reach out the college professor you would like to study with and they may even take you on as a student. Even if you don't end up going there they may be a great resource and contact in during your studies and beyond.

Finally just ask people who are currently performing in the field you would love to join. For example sending a professional email to the section members of the closest major orchestra may set you up with a great teacher.



2. Play with Other Musicians

Getting experience playing in different environments and players will challenge you to grow as a musician and make you a more attractive candidate when applying to Music Schools. If you are an oboe player, play in your school band/orchestra, audition for local youth orchestras and form a chamber group with your friends.

Music is about community and the more players you connect with the more you will learn. The more you know the better prepared you will be to succeed as a music major. If you live in a smaller town without a youth orchestra, use the internet to meet musicians and work on you own performing projects. This will

show yourself and the schools you apply to that you are a devoted musician who knows how to take initiative.

3. Sing

Singing universal to human musical culture, and fundamental to musical expression. All music majors are required to sing, every day, in multiple classes...so a lot! Take advantage of every chance to vocalize. If you can find a group or setting that will teach you vocal technique even better!

Good places to look are high school choir, community college choir or even church choirs. If none of those are available YouTube has tones of vocal coaches to help you develop your voice and your ear. This is probably the biggest thing I regret not doing in high school.

4. Know Your Scales

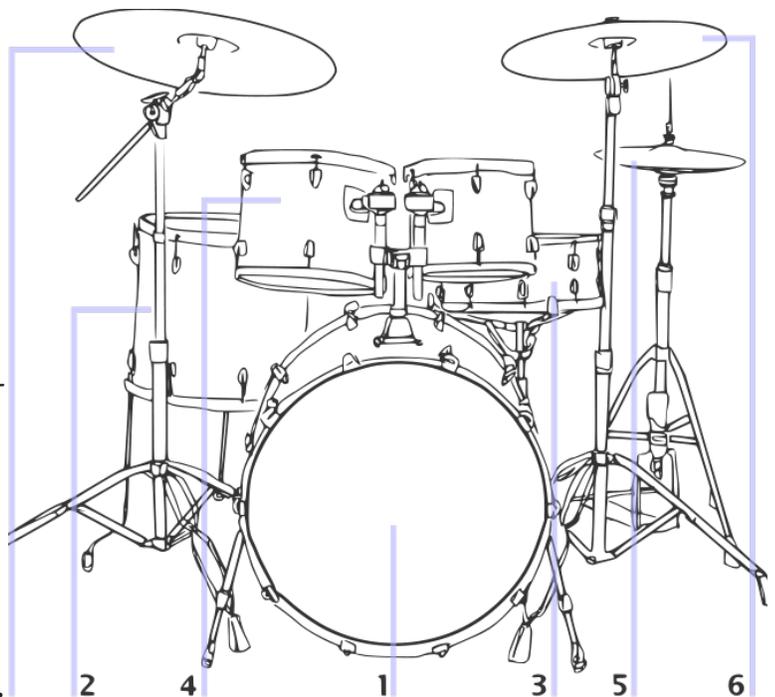
As a music major you will be expected to develop the technique needed to play the repertoire of your instrument, while performing standard pieces for large ensembles and chamber groups, not to mention etudes and solos for your lessons. If you are still learning scales when you arrive you will be at a disadvantage and may not be able to take advantage of opportunities that require a certain facility on your instrument.

For oboe players I recommend at least being able to play through the Whitney Tustin or the second half of the Gekeler book II by the time you graduate high school. Click on the name of the method to get a link to purchase the book on Amazon.

5. Learn to play the drums

Even if it is just a little! Rhythm deficiencies will slow down your studies a lot in music school. I remember plenty of singers with beautiful voices who could not pass out of freshman aural skills because they just couldn't keep a pulse and subdivide.

Drum set trains you to feel the subdivisions and keep a steady pulse more obviously and thoroughly than any other instrument, but even getting a chance to play on the drumline or percussion ensemble at your school or church will do wonders for your pulse and rhythm.



6 .Learn to play some basic piano

In addition to sight singing, all undergrad music majors will need to pass a piano proficiency exam or take class piano. If you started on piano and switched to a different instrument, dust off your old piano methods and brush up.

If you have never played before there are tons of free tutorials on youtube to help you get the basics. Class piano at your local community college or a few private lessons may serve your needs as well.

7. Learn some music theory

Students who see music theory for the first time in freshman theory class often struggle, especially students who have backgrounds learn chiefly or exclusively by ear (Drummers, Guitarists, Singers, though they are usually more natural players and do well in Aural Skills class).

Any pre-college exposure to formal music theory is an amazing opportunity you should take advantage of. Take AP-Music Theory if you can, some community colleges offer theory classes you can take as a high school student, and finally look up free theory courses on Youtube or (my favorite) Teoria.com.

8. Read Biographies of your favorite composers

Music history class is important to contextualize your place as a musician in the larger cultural landscape, but it can be difficult without something to ground your interest. If you can learn some historical information on your favorite composer(s) you will have an easier time keeping track of the plethora of information that awaits you in Freshman Music History survey courses.

9. Go to live concerts

This one should be obvious, but just in case: if you want to study music seriously you should actually like music. Go to concerts and reflect on what you liked and what you're not so fond of at the moment. The excitement of hearing live music can inspire you to become a better musician and performer. In contrast even going to a flop concert can show you how not to present yourself on stage.

Going to concerts also helps you network with other musicians and form a support network. Be nice to everyone you meet! When you support other rising musicians, they will also support you.



10. Listen to Recordings

Ask your teacher and musician friends what their favorite recordings are. Bonding over recordings are a great way to connect to the musician network. When you know what symphonies, orchestras, soloists, or chamber pieces you like go get a CD or MP3(they are so cheap to download) of your favorites and related pieces.

So many freshman in music school have a limited exposure to different ensembles, styles, and musical vocabulary, especially that fall outside the scope of their preference or specialty. Recordings are an easy way to gain exposure to all the awesome music out there though no tool can compare to YouTube...

11. Actively listen to music on Youtube

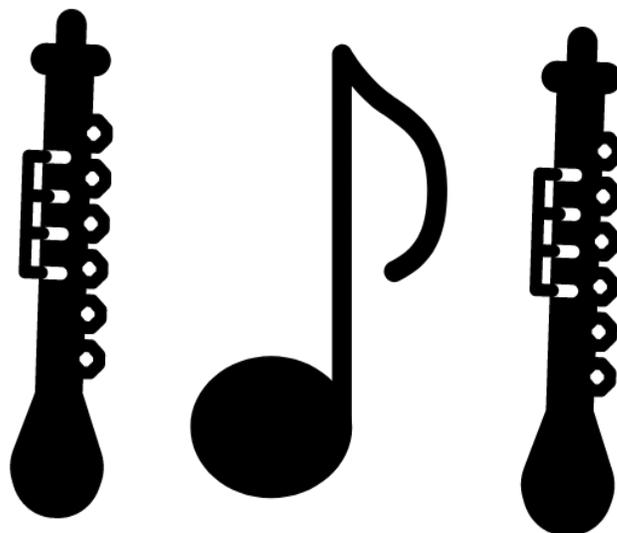
Music has never been easier to gain access to. You can look up performers who have mastered your instrument or find musicians discussing their thoughts on vibrato or scales or even “Preparing to major in music”.

Take the next step and comment on videos with your thoughts and engage the music community. Music is all about interaction, and this amazing resource allows you to do this on an international scale. I wish I had been born 10 years later than I was to have had access to YouTube when getting ready for college!

12. Learn to Care for your body

Your body is your most important instrument and it is not indestructible. Learning about nutrition, how to properly exercise, and relieve stress are imperative to your health and well being. With out the proper self care you may not be able to endure the physical demands that a music degree entails.. Good playing or singing technique will also help you avoid injury.

Countless students suffer permanent damage from tendinitis, myofascial pain (muscle stiffness), and other overuse injuries, as well as mental health issues. These can be avoided with a good diet, regular exercise, and stretch breaks to break up practice sessions. A massage every now and again couldn't hurt. No amount of practicing will mater if your body is not physically able to perform.



13. Record your practice!

This goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway. You want to be the best you can at your instrument. Practice actively and presently. Shoot for retention and comprehension rather than speed (though this may also come). The devil is in the details. Practice with and without a metronome and tuner.

Use your phone or an external device to record yourself my favorite is the Zoom Q3 but there are many! Listen back to yourself and give yourself honest critiques. Its like a free lesson!

14. Learn to use some Music Software and Tech

Everyone under the age of 18 is expected to have some working knowledge of word processors and email, but musicians will have a much easier time in school if they are familiar with engraving software like Sebelius, Finale, or even Logic.

These programs can get a little pricey, but there are student and educator discounts and you may even get a free version through your high school, just ask. There are also free programs online like MusScore, LillyPond, or MusInk.

Familiarity with other audio technology like headphones, midi keyboards, and microphones, is extremely beneficial. Ask a seasoned and active musician for help, everyone starts somewhere with the ever changing field of technology.

15. Compose a piece for yourself or your friends

Develop your skills discussed in tip number 12 and write some music. Don't get in your head about it and just create something; anything! Write something for yourself, or for your friends, or, if you're feeling ambitious, for your teacher.

If writing original music sound a little overwhelming at first you can ease into the process by writing an arrangement instead.

Bonus! 16. Write an arrangement

If you can, write 5! This can be more accessible than composing something new. Arrange anything you like, could be pop songs or even just a piano piece you think would sound good on marimba or oboe duo.

This skill is great for developing your musical literacy. By writing and playing with different colors your ears and mind will open up in a way that will speed up the introductory phase of your undergraduate career.

Conclusion

If you are serious about embarking on a degree program in Music, I am so excited for you! Just remember being a musician is not something you become when you get your degree. You are a musician when you decide that is who you are. Treat yourself well and be prepared. I hope these tips help you feel ready for starting your undergraduate career in Music. Good Luck!!!