

AUDITION PLAYBOOK

OPTIMAL PLANNING FOR
ORCHESTRAL AUDITION SUCCESS

Part One: The Guide

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FOREWORD

Dear Performers,

If you are looking to up your game in terms of a very detailed approach to audition planning and repertoire preparation, the Audition Playbook is a resource you need. Rachelle Jenkins has written a very comprehensive and thorough guide to making sure that you cover these bases during the months leading up to an important audition.

As a peak performance psychologist and someone who has helped thousands of performing artists and athletes win auditions and competitions, I believe that it is really important to have goals as well as reflect on past experiences. I appreciate the interactive nature of this book where Rachelle gives you space to do these things.

I feel very fortunate to have met and taught Rachelle during her time as a student at the Colburn School Conservatory in Los Angeles, CA. She was enrolled in my Peak Performance training class. Not only was she a driven and impressive horn student, but she was already performing often with groups including the Montreal Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Florida Orchestra, and Naples Philharmonic.

Good luck auditioning!

*All the best,
Dr. Don Greene*

Dr. Don Greene

Peak Performance Psychologist

www.winningonstage.com

Author of *Fight Your Fear and Win, Performance Success, and Audition Success*

CHANGES TO THE 2nd EDITION

If you've used a copy of the Audition Playbook before, you'll probably notice that the book you're holding looks quite a bit different! As demand for the book has grown over the past two years, so has the need to change the printing and publishing process. In doing so, certain basic formatting changes were required. Fortunately, this gave me the opportunity to explore other revisions that would change the look and effectiveness of the book. It has taken some time, but I am very happy with final product.

While many of the pages may look different in Part One, the text is almost entirely the same. There are small details added or re-worded for clarification and certain ideas have been expounded upon throughout the text. However, it is important to note that, while many additions and cosmetic changes have been made, nothing from the original book has been removed or omitted from this edition.

Part Two is entirely revamped. Each chart has been cleaned up and tweaked to reflect feedback from readers, including most notably the Weekly Practice Planning sheets. Additionally, there were previously six weeks of daily and weekly practice planning sheets printed. After surveying readers, I decided to shrink this down to four weeks. If you need more than four weeks of sheets, or if you prefer old layouts of any charts, you can download additional copies at www.auditionplaybook.com or reach out to me directly at the link below.

Thank you for your continued support in this ever-evolving project. It has been gratifying and inspiring to hear all of your stories and experiences while working through the book. As always, please feel free to reach out with any questions, comments, or suggestions. Please contact me through the website at www.auditionplaybook.com/contact/

Rachelle Jenkins
March 2020

AUDITION PLAYBOOK

OPTIMAL PLANNING FOR
ORCHESTRAL AUDITION SUCCESS

Part One: The Guide

GETTING STARTED

1

What is the Audition Playbook?

The Audition Playbook is a two-part guide and workbook designed to help musicians of all instruments and levels efficiently and effectively plan and prepare for orchestra, band, and any other ensemble auditions. No matter your experience level or the level of the groups for which you are auditioning, the Audition Playbook provides the framework for you to carefully and effectively create, implement, and follow your own plan from start to finish.

Many factors go into having a successful audition and every winner will tell you about wildly different sets of tools and secrets that worked to set them apart from the pack. Every person – and every audition – is different. However, there are certain elements that tend to be universal among audition winners and, often, the most important factor is simply having a plan – a thoughtful, deliberate plan – and sticking with it.

Michael Phelps never just jumps in the pool and hopes for the best. The New England Patriots don't just casually toss the ball around in Tom Brady's backyard every weekend leading up to the Super Bowl. Every step of the way is methodically planned – from nutrition to conditioning to game day routines and beyond. In this regard, musicians preparing for auditions should be no different.

This is in no way a “one-size-fits-all” type of system and I do not endeavor to plan out your audition for you. Think of the Audition Playbook simply as the canvas upon which to design your own preparation. “Part One: The Guide” offers an overview of the the many different facets of audition preparation to consider and provides different tools, suggestions, and exercises to implement into your plan. “Part Two: The Workbook” is your personal Audition Playbook. There are no rules or requirements to the book that follows other than to have a plan, write down your plan, stick with it, and adjust accordingly.

While you will spend time planning the obvious nuts-and-bolts elements of audition preparation – your daily and weekly practice, mock auditions, travel

logistics, et cetera – the Audition Playbook encourages you to prepare for the unexpected as well.

You cannot control so much of what happens on audition day – including just about every single thing that happens on the other side of the screen – but you *can* plan to account for every other possibility. What if your car breaks down on the way to the prelims? What if the proctor rushes you into the next round? What if a string breaks in your warm-up room? What if they ask for an excerpt that's not on the list? What if you don't sleep well the night before? Just giving yourself the peace of mind that you have at least *considered* the possibilities, no matter how absurd, and your possible reactions in the moment can bring a lot of comfort on audition day. Knowing that you have put in serious, measurable work on and off the instrument and seeing that work tracked in your Audition Playbook leading up to the audition can significantly boost your confidence when it's go-time.

Why did you create this?

I was a late bloomer to the horn. I gave it a try in 6th grade but abandoned it within six months. Around 11th grade, I came back around to the instrument and – somehow – ended up going to college for horn. I was very fortunate that my school, the University of Central Florida (UCF), cultivated an environment that gave me the space to make up for some of that lost time and learn how to play the instrument, while also offering numerous playing opportunities and chances to just jump in headfirst and grow. The horn was always in my hand for those four years.

When I first started at UCF, I didn't know you could actually *major* in performance... or what an "excerpt" was... or how to transpose... or that horn players even *needed* to transpose... or how people got jobs in orchestras... I had never even been to an orchestra concert! Needless to say, I had a lot of catching up to do, but UCF was a wonderful and safe place to do so.

By the time I started my master's at McGill University, I had a slightly better understanding of the orchestra world and how auditions were a huge part of that. My playing was improving, I was getting work experience in some good orchestras, and I thought I would walk out of McGill with a big job in hand.

I did not.

I advanced for the very first time during grad school in an audition for the Québec Symphony. I was so excited to get out first round!

But then I did not advance again for three years. Three years! It pains me even now to type that but I simply had no idea what I was doing. Admittedly, there were some big holes in my technique that needed to be sorted through, but moreover, there was a complete lack of understanding about what it takes to properly prepare for an audition and be a real contender. My preparation was lacking even when I did not realize it was lacking. I practiced the excerpts, used my metronome and tuner, recorded occasionally ... so, why wasn't I advancing? And why was my performance on audition day so much worse than everything I was doing in the practice room?

After a while, I felt I must have hit a glass ceiling. I was working very hard and I knew that my playing was steadily improving but I was stuck. To say I was frustrated and discouraged would be a serious understatement. At a certain point, tired of hitting my head on the wall and expecting a different result, I stubbornly realized that it had to be more than what I was doing on the horn.

In 2015, I decided that I needed to either to go back to school and figure this out or hang it up and switch careers. As luck would have it, an opportunity presented itself at just the right time and the career change idea was put on hold. That fall, I enrolled in the Professional Studies program at The Colburn School in Los Angeles and spent my three years there working not only to fix my horn playing (which needed a lot of work) but also my approach to auditioning, performing, practicing, preparing, and thinking. I realized very quickly – with the help of my horn teacher, Andrew Bain, and performance psychologist, Dr. Don Greene – that there were so many moving parts of audition preparation that I hadn't even yet *considered*. My practice was poorly organized, I never practiced *performing*, I didn't have any strategy for mental preparation, I never committed to mock auditions ... the list goes on and on.

Essentially, it all boiled down to one thing – I had no plan. In my first semester at Colburn, I advanced for the first time in years at an audition for the Montréal Symphony and I felt as though my curse was finally broken. Within the next year, I started advancing regularly, and was even making finals and super finals in auditions.

So what made the difference? The most obvious reasons are that my playing improved and that I started to develop the mental skills needed to strengthen my mind in auditions. But on top of all of that, I had a plan. For every audition, I was organized and had a plan – a plan for the weeks of preparation, a plan for the

improvements to my technique, a plan for the moments on stage, a plan for how each excerpt would sound... everything.

The plan didn't always work. In fact, it often did not work. However, I took note, adjusted course, and changed the plan for the next one. I started to notice trends in my preparation and realized that many of the charts and tools I was creating for each individual audition could be compiled together in a ready-to-go workbook. With this, I could simply print out my workbook and launch straight into preparation anytime an audition was announced. Best of all, I could save my workbook with all of my notes and look back at exactly what I did to prepare for previous auditions. This information helped to more efficiently determine which areas of my playing would need the most focus for upcoming auditions, based on clear, measurable data that I would have likely otherwise forgotten.

Around the same time, I was thinking about sports and how so much of sports psychology can relate to music. I believe this extends into our preparation for auditions in more areas than just having mental strength in performance. To have a successful audition, we have to have a solid game plan *and* an ability to execute that plan. This book functions as that plan – a playbook – in the same way that a football team has a playbook going into any game or season. It is not a restrictive plan that you must follow exactly from cover to cover or use to upend everything about your usual approach. Instead, it acts as guidance for you to create your own plan.

This seems excessive... do I really have to do everything in here?

No! But maybe for the first time, just to see which parts of the Playbook are most beneficial for you. Some may wish to follow the Playbook exactly, others may wish to pick and choose. It is up to you. The purpose of this book is not to make you follow everything here exclusively and entirely, but instead to encourage you to have a plan and to give you as many ideas as possible towards building that plan. Admittedly, as much as I love the structure and organization of many of these strategies, I can occasionally get bogged down by too much structure in my life. For some auditions, I need to do everything in the Playbook. Other times, I know I need to let the foot off the pedal a bit. I have come to this realization by going through the process many times and focusing intently and honestly on what has and hasn't worked for me. I now build my personal Audition Playbook accordingly, reflecting on what I have learned about myself in past auditions, and taking an

honest look at my life in the present and the coming weeks leading up to each audition.

I believe that two of the most important factors of having a solid audition plan are flexibility and balance. If the planning here starts to feel restrictive and counterproductive to your goals, then it might be time to re-evaluate which parts of your Playbook are making you feel this way. Whatever worked for your last time might be a little too neurotic for whatever is going on in your life this time. This is normal. Give everything a fair try but be flexible and kind to yourself. The goal is to have a Playbook geared towards YOU and YOUR auditions – not to check off every box of what *should* work for everyone else.

How should I use this book?

The book is divided into two major sections. Part One is your guide to developing your own personal Audition Playbook. Part Two is your customizable Audition Playbook where you will personalize your plan and track your progress.

As you read through the instructions in Part One, begin working on the corresponding sections of your Playbook in Part Two. You may also choose simply to launch right into Part Two. As I said before, it's all up to you!

While you are encouraged to write all over the pages that follow, in speaking with many readers of the first versions of this book, I've discovered that most prefer to make photocopies of Part Two in order to keep a clean copy handy for future auditions. Others prefer to create versions of these charts by hand in their personal notebooks or create digital versions to track on their laptop or phone as they practice. Please do whatever makes you most comfortable. For supplemental PDFs, as well as Google Sheets and Excel versions of some of the charts in Part Two, please visit www.auditionplaybook.com.

If you have questions along the way, please reach out! There is an ever-growing community of Audition Playbook readers who are continuously learning, discovering, and sharing new things about their audition journeys and experiences with the book. To access the online discussion group for the Audition Playbook, please visit www.facebook.com/groups/auditionplaybook. Introduce yourself, ask questions, and share your journey with us! You can always contact me directly as well with questions, coaching requests, or to just say hello! www.auditionplaybook.com/contact/

Basic Outline of Part One: The Guide

In Chapter 2, you will see an outline of the **four phases of audition preparation**. Read through the descriptions of each phase and start working through the corresponding checklist. The amount of time you will spend in each phase depends on how many weeks you have until audition day. The Four Phases Checklist is one of the most important parts of this book and needs to be referred back to daily.

After you've figured out how many weeks there are until your audition and how much time to spend in each phase, it's time to set your **goals**. In Chapter 3, you will reflect upon past audition experiences and write out your goals for both preparation (the weeks ahead) and performance (the audition day itself). These goals will be important along the way to be able to check back in and ask yourself if you are staying true to your original intentions or needing to adjust course.

In Chapter 4, you will set your baseline by taking **initial assessments** of your technique and current knowledge of the excerpts. From here, you will develop a better idea of which parts of your technique and the repertoire list will require more of your focus and energy.

In addition to assessing your playing, you will take a brief step back and take a look at the overall picture of **balance** in your life as a whole. When do you feel you play your best, most happily, and most genuinely? In those moments, how much time are you spending dedicated to your instrument? To exercise? To spending time with friends? There is no one-size-fits-all answer, but it is important to ask yourself these questions.

Chapter 5 is the meat and potatoes of the plan. Here you will **plan your daily and weekly practicing** and track your progress along the way.

Chapter 6 focuses on the **development of performance skills**. This section is all about recording, mock auditions, rehearsing with pianists, and more.

In Chapter 7, it's Go Time. You will plan for the unplanned with **scenario planning**. You will brainstorm things that can go wrong on audition day – or that

have gone wrong for you before – and decide how you will react to these scenarios in the moment. You will also develop your **audition day script**, planning the nuts and bolts of your travel, food, schedule, etc. After the audition, you will work on your **post-audition reflection** so that you're in even better shape for the next one – whenever that may be!

Following Chapter 7, you will find an extensive list of **recommended resources**. Please refer to this list as you make your way through the book and as questions arise during your preparation.

Lastly, an important note

An absolutely crucial part of audition preparation is the mental component related to centering, mental rehearsal, visualizations, self-talk, meditation, adversity training, etc. Absent here is any detailed plan regarding mental preparation – not because it is unimportant but because this area is highly personal and variable. What works for one does not work for all. I am not a psychologist and this is not a book on psychology. For further planning and exploration in this area, please refer to the recommended resources listed on pages 41-45 and at auditionplaybook.com/resources for regularly updated resources.

Additionally, it is important to remember along the way that the development of your Audition Playbook is a process – just like the development of your playing. Be patient with yourself and do not look at this book – or any resource – as the singular golden ticket to winning an audition. While your Playbook endeavors to plan for every possibility, there will always be factors for which we cannot predict.

Keep at it and enjoy the process!

Create your ultimate audition plan.



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