

Tips for Successful All-State Auditions

It's been said that success in life is directly proportional to the amount of time spent on detail. If you've auditioned year after year for All-State and not gotten in, here are some detailed things to increase your chances of success. These tips are gleaned from my own experience taking auditions and from 20+ years of guiding my private flute students through their preparation for All-State auditions.

FIRST, get the requirements EARLY and practice them all summer. Procrastination will only lead to sloppy, tension filled practice later! The Florida Bandmasters Association (FBA) typically publishes the audition pieces and scale requirements the first week of May. You can get these requirements from your band director or look them up yourself on the FBA website under All-State auditions. <http://fba.flmusiced.org/all-state/audition-requirements/>

There are 3 parts to the All-State audition—Scales (majors and chromatic), Required Pieces (Lyrical and Technical) and Sight-reading. The Major scale section has a 2-minute time limit (either all 7 in 2 minutes or all 12 in 2 minutes).

Make sure you double check for accuracy which book; measure numbers and metronome speeds for each required piece. If you play the wrong piece or the wrong section of the right piece, you most certainly won't be accepted.

Major Scales: Learn, and MEMORIZE all of the required scales 2 octaves (3 octaves where possible) at the proper speeds. The standard today is to play 3 octaves on B major (if you have a B foot joint), C, Db, and D major, and sometimes even Eb major! Each scale is judged individually and no points are given for 1-octave scales. However, if you attempt any of these scales 3 octaves, be sure you use the correct fingerings!! When I coach students on this, I recommend practicing scales for accuracy FIRST. Speed comes later. ALWAYS practice your scales with a metronome. Remember to play them tongued going up and slurred coming down. You must demonstrate that you can play equally well in all keys. Because arpeggios seem to trouble the majority of young students and are played at the end of the scale, I recommend you practice the arpeggio first, then the scale, then the arpeggio again! Keep record of the metronome speed you can play each scale and gradually increase the speed every few days. Only increase the speed AFTER you've played the scale accurately 10-20 times at a slower tempo. There are no points given for fast and sloppy!!

Chromatic Scale: The 3 octave chromatic scale is one of the most challenging parts of the audition. The speed requirement alone usually scares off most students. However, if you start early and practice it slowly and accurately in small chunks, you'll be prepared. I recommend practicing it in note groups of 5 first (C-E, E-G#, G#-C) both forwards and backwards, tonguing up and slurring down. Do this slowly with a metronome beginning at quarter note=60. Once you can play the small chunks, then go up to 10 note chunks (C-G#, G#-E, etc.) The lowest and highest groups are usually the most difficult so focus your attention on practicing those. Plan where you are going to breathe as well. Having a planned breath will help with note accuracy and consistency.

Lyrical and Technical Pieces: Make sure you have the correct book and double check the required piece and measure numbers. Are there repeats or D.C. or D.S.? Note the required tempo and keep in mind this is the speed you should have it by the **audition** and **NOT** the speed you should start learning the piece. Get the rhythms and

notes under your fingers slowly while paying close attention to articulations, dynamics and any other expression markings. Having the guidance of an experienced teacher is extremely important through this process. Musical phrasing, a beautiful tone and expression will be what sets you apart from the crowd, not just getting the notes at the right speed. Learn the music! If the piece is part of a duet, learn the other part and practice with a friend or record the other part and play a duet with yourself. Record yourself and listen back and be your own teacher when you're away from your lessons. Try memorizing the pieces too. If you practice diligently through the summer, by the audition you will have memorized them easily! Memorization of the pieces builds confidence and that's handy to have when you must play them under pressure.

Sight-reading: This part of the audition is usually the most worrisome to everyone. I say the only way to get better at sight-reading is to DO IT everyday. Practice sight-reading music you own and haven't played before. Learn how to quickly (under a minute) scan a piece to determine the time and key signatures and any difficult spots. Quickly finger through the scale/key the piece is in, while continuing to scan the piece. Learn your musical terms so you're ready to convey everything the composer intended. Establish a tempo that is steady (i.e. use your metronome) and a bit slower than what you think you can play. Then, start playing and train yourself to keep going regardless! If you stumble, recover quickly and move on. Don't go back! It's not about getting all the right notes, but about showing accurate, steady rhythm and musicality under pressure. Don't sweat the small stuff. Try to show the bigger picture. You can alleviate the stress of sight-reading by starting and keeping a slow, reasonable tempo through the whole piece.

Final thoughts on auditioning:

- Seek advice from an experienced teacher.
- Record yourself often and time yourself on the scales, then listen back.
- Play for others: first for friends and family, then for someone who makes you a bit nervous (band director or teacher)
- Practice visualizing the perfect audition from start to finish.
- Eat well and get a good night's sleep the night before the audition. Good nutrition and rest sets you up to do your best. Eating a banana before the audition and drinking plenty of water are good things too.
- To build your confidence and calm nerves: think of other successful auditions or concerts you've played and any positive encouragement you've received in the past.
- In the warm up room: focus on breathing and tone. Don't make any crazed, last minute runs through the pieces. You've practiced and you're ready. Don't listen to others warming up—comparison will make you nervous and when all is said and done, it doesn't matter what people sound like there anyways. Listen to a calm recording on your phone. Avoid socializing with others before you play. Take the time to focus your thoughts and energies before auditioning.