

2023 Midwest Band & Orchestra Clinic

From Application, to Audition, to Accepted: Preparing for Graduate Conducting Studies

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Session Handout & Resource

Before You Apply

- GO TEACH FIRST
 - Professors prefer applicants with at least 2-4 years of teaching experience. (It doesn't have to be at the high school level!)
 - "Hardest part of the first few years of teaching is not knowing what you don't know."
 - Gives context to what you will learn in graduate school.
 - Also...time to save money.
- Use this time to expand your experiences: Community bands, teach lessons, clinic at other schools, etc.
- Record rehearsals and concerts whenever possible. Watch videos regularly, and make note of the best moments. Ask mentors or trusted experienced conductors/teachers to give feedback.
- Research possible conducting programs:
 - Who...do you want to study with? Ask around and watch concerts. Go to conducting symposiums. Ask former teachers/mentors who they think would be a good fit.
 - Who else is in the studio? (MM and/or DMA students?)
 - Seek out current or recent graduate students at Midwest or other conferences. Be prepared and have thoughtful questions, not simply just "tell me more about the program."
 - What conducting curriculum does the school use? Does it align with how you want to learn?
 - What...ensembles do grad students work with? What do you want out of this degree? What experiences are essential to you?
 - For wind band candidates - Are there concert & athletic band components? Chamber ensemble opportunities? What are the requirements of your degree- thesis, recitals, etc?
 - Where...are you willing to move? (It's a 2-3 year commitment!)
 - When...do you want to begin? Some schools do not have openings every year. Are you willing to wait for the "perfect fit", or is time of the essence?
 - How...will you pay for it? (Tuition, assistantships, benefits, loans)
 - You have value. Go where you are valued!

- Consider the stipend vs cost of living. (Use a cost of living calculator)
- 9 months to a year in advance of the application deadline - Reach out to the conducting professor and ask for a meeting and/or lesson.
 - State your intention and for what school year you will be applying.
 - Come prepared with music to conduct and plenty of questions.
 - Meeting for coffee at Midwest is another great way to begin to establish a relationship. Ask early, and keep it brief- they're busy!!
- Conducting Symposiums are a great place to build relationships with potential conducting teachers!
 - Research if the professor is a clinician and attend that symposium.
 - Most symposium applications open Dec-Jan and are first come, first serve. Jump on it early!
 - To learn more about upcoming symposiums, join the "Graduate Wind Conductors Association" Facebook group!
 - If you can't get into a symposium with a director that you are hoping to work with, consider asking if they are doing an honor or all-state band in your area. This is a good way to see them work and see if their style is a good match for you.
- Visit campus: Spend time with faculty, current grad students, and observe rehearsals.
 - If the degree involves marching band, observe a marching rehearsal. You will probably be working with ALL band faculty, make sure they know you.
 - This is the time to consider - Is it a good match philosophically and personality-wise with the program, DOB, other faculty? What does this program look for and value in graduate students? You'll be happier at a place that is a natural fit, rather than trying to act like you are a good fit.

The Application - Commonly Asked Materials

- Statement of Purpose
 - State your long-range professional goals and why a conducting degree will help you achieve this.
 - Include teaching philosophy thoughts, etc.
 - Provide 2-3 aspects of your current conducting that you wish to develop in this degree. (Score study, gesture, presence, etc.)
 - This shows you have taken time to identify what you need to work on.
 - Why do you think this school is the right place to work on that?
 - Answer why you believe this specific school is the right place to meet your professional and personal goals.
 - Be genuine! Professors can tell if you submit a stock statement that reads the same for any school.
 - Your Statement of Purpose will be much stronger if you have taken the time to research the program and met with the faculty.

- Resume/CV Checklist
 - **FORMATTING IS IMPORTANT.** Ensure formatting is consistent between pages/sections. This is a great time to highlight your attention to detail.
 - **Objective** - What type of position are you applying for?
 - **Educational Preparation** - College degree with GPA (be prepared to present transcripts!)
 - **Teaching Experience**
 - Include ALL work experience in teaching / leadership positions with students. It is a small world and you will be surprised who knows each other. CONNECTIONS!
 - **Leadership** - College organizations / positions held. Include succinct descriptions.
 - **Honors and Awards** - College / Relevant High School
 - **Professional Development / Symposiums** - Add years to show consistency.
 - Have you presented a clinic before? Include the handouts in your portfolio!

- List of Works Studied
 - Include sections for: Conducted in Concert, Conducted in Rehearsal, Studied but have not conducted.
 - Show depth and diversity of repertoire.

- Most Significant Pieces
 - This is an opportunity to show your knowledge of the “canon,” and what you value as significant.
 - Not sure where to start?
 - The New Winds of Change - Frank Battisti
 - Great Music For Wind Band - Chad Nicholson
 - Teaching Music Through Performance in Band
 - A Guide to the Top 100 Works in Grades IV, V, VI - Chad Nicholson

- Conducting Video
 - Include excerpts in both rehearsal and concert settings. Get in the habit of recording yourself often, and watch the videos regularly. Documenting best moments saves time, rather than sifting through hours of footage while putting our video together.
 - High quality video AND audio is very important.
 - Video: Set up camera facing you - Make sure the framing is correct. HD quality is highly preferred.
 - Audio: Have a microphone set up behind & above the podium to capture both your voice and the band’s sound.
 - Audacity is free and has [background noise removal](#) (HVAC, speaker hum, etc.)

- Combine and edit clips for professional look/sound. Include title/composer for each piece. (iMovie, DaVinci Resolve, etc.)
 - Begin the video with your strongest clip. Try not to include warm-ups.
 - Professors look for:
 - Professional video presentation
 - Strong grasp of conducting fundamentals
 - Good rapport with ensemble
 - Ability to communicate musical ideas and rehearse well - Use clips that clearly show ensemble growth. (Ex. Show three clips of the same piece at the beginning, middle, and end of the rehearsal cycle)
 - Good Teaching - efficient and clear
- Portfolio Checklist
 - **Table of Contents**
 - Tab relevant sections together
 - **Section One - Application Materials**
 - Provide hard copies of all your application materials
 - List of References (3-5)
 - Recommendation Letters (3-5)
 - Be sure your recommenders are aware you are listing them, and ensure they can speak to some of your recent accomplishments and work, too. Not just your undergraduate career!
 - **Section Two - Audition Preparation**
 - Analysis of your audition piece
 - Lesson plan for the audition
 - **Section Three - Applicant Created Materials**
 - Sample Marching Drill (if wind band focused)
 - Consider using a QR code that links to a private YouTube channel
 - Composed / Arranged music
 - **Section Four - Research Materials**
 - Senior Thesis / Honors Projects
 - Research Papers
 - **Section Five - Documentation**
 - Official Transcripts- order these ahead of time and keep 2-3 on hand, just in case!
 - Awards - college level leadership, teaching, and performance awards
- Helpful Hints When Applying
 - Get several opinions on your materials before submitting.
 - After submitting your application materials, send a drive folder link in an email to the professor. Thank them for the opportunity to apply!
 - Google your name and see what appears.
 - Clean up your social media!!

The Audition - Preparing & Prevailing!

After the Invitation

- Familiarize yourself with the campus and specific buildings beforehand. Allow for plenty of time to travel to campus, and be sure to consider parking locations.
- If given the choice of several audition times, choose a later time slot.
 - Later auditions are more memorable to the interview committee.
- Have your portfolio ready.
 - Consider either physical binders with relevant materials, or a QR code to an online portfolio.
 - Adjust portfolios for each school.
- Prepare your audition piece(s):
 - Use only the original score, no photocopies.
 - Full analysis of the work
 - Research composer & piece background
 - Form, tonality, harmonic structure, rhythm, orchestration, etc.
 - Performance considerations
 - Create a lesson plan - Some professors ask for this in advance

Day Before Audition

- Look up directions to the school.
 - Make note of construction or traffic.
 - Look up directions using the time you will be leaving. Traffic patterns / amounts change depending on the time of day. Sometimes by 30 minutes or more!
 - Find where to park. College campuses are usually difficult to find parking midday-plan accordingly.
- Check the weather. (Always have a spare jacket & umbrella in your car)
- Sing & Conduct your audition piece and run through your lesson plan.
 - Keep in mind: "A lesson plan is only perfect until the band starts playing." - Mr. Paul Davis
 - Have many ideas and be adaptable.
- Run through sample questions and prepared answers.
- SLEEP!!

Day of Audition

- Eat a full breakfast and drink water.
- Dress for success
 - Full suits are the most professional.
 - Wear comfortable shoes.
 - Stay away from tight constricting clothing - be comfortable! You don't want to be tugging or adjusting your clothing all day.

- Wear something you can comfortably conduct in! Dark, solid colors are easiest for the ensemble to see your baton.
- Give yourself plenty of time - running late will just add stress.

During Audition

- When waiting for the audition, meet and talk with other faculty or students. The audition starts when you walk in the front door.
- When the audition begins, make a note of the names of all faculty members present. This will make it easier when writing thank you notes.
- Have pre-prepared answers for frequently asked interview questions, but don't memorize responses. The best interviews are conversations.
- Posture matters!
 - TED Talk: [Your body language may shape who you are](#) - Amy Cuddy
- Have 3-5 questions prepared to ask the director. Research the school / music program and ask specific questions.
- What professors look for in an auditionee:
 - Confident, but not cocky
 - Musical - Are you prepared to make informed musical decisions, based on in-depth score study?
 - Communicative - Are you able to effectively communicate with the ensemble through gesture and verbal instructions and feedback.
 - Adaptable - Are you flexible with the lesson plan, based on aural responses from the ensemble?
 - Personable - How do you treat the people that you interact with throughout the day? This extends beyond the faculty and interviewers!
 - Curious - Are you interested in truly learning and growing as a musician?
 - Reflective - can you speak thoughtfully about your experiences, mistakes, and important moments? Can you demonstrate that you have learned from your mistakes or from difficult times? This shows someone who can grow and learn!
- If there are musicianship exams as part of the audition, be prepared! Your current skill level is important, but your level of preparation says a lot about how you value this opportunity.

After Audition

- Mail thank you notes immediately after the interview.
- Thank the professor for the opportunity to meet with them.
 - Discuss 1 or 2 topics you made note of during the audition.
 - Thank the professor again and wish them well.

Commonly Asked Interview Questions

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself!
2. Why do you want to get your Masters/Doctoral degree in conducting?
3. What makes you stand out as a candidate/How will you make our organization better?
4. Why do you want to be a part of this specific studio?
5. How will you work to develop a positive relationship with other students and professors?
6. Talk about a time when you failed, struggled, or had to overcome adversity.
7. Talk about a time when you worked collaboratively as part of a team to achieve a goal.
8. Tell about a time you taught a lesson and students didn't understand/it didn't go well. How did you use data to inform your future instruction?
9. How would the following people describe you: Cooperating teacher? Principal? Colleague? Students?
10. What would your previous employer or college advisor say were your greatest strengths for teaching, and what areas would they suggest were areas that needed growth? Do you agree with those assessments?
11. How would you describe your rehearsal management style?
12. Can you speak briefly on your teaching philosophy, and how that guides your priorities on and off the podium?
13. What do the first 5-10 minutes of your rehearsal look like? The last 5-10 minutes?
14. What is something you've read about or seen recently that you would like to try in your own rehearsal?
15. How much practice time do you expect from yourself or students?
16. What questions do you have for the interview team?
17. How will you make sure that students are challenged in your music class?
18. What's your favorite musical concept to teach?
19. What are some books you've read recently?
20. How do you nurture and grow your creative self?

Questions to Ask the Interviewers

1. What are you looking for in a candidate for this position?
2. How are TA assignments decided? Is there a set rotation, or is it flexible based on individual needs?
3. How many students are participating in ensembles now?
4. Have your music students traveled in the past? If so, where?
5. I see on your website _____?
6. What are the facilities like? Can I see them?
7. What is the university's policy on professional leave for conferences?
8. What are recent graduates of this program doing now?
9. What sort of initiatives or events are coming up this semester?

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Graduate Wind Conductors Association