

The Process of Auditions (and the Imperative of Deliberate Practice)

MPAPS-UE 1131.005

MPAPS-GE 2131.005

Spring Semester 2020

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Course Description:

The Process of Auditions is formulated for the ambitious instrumentalist intent not only on refining their audition-taking skills, but also employing the foundational skill of “deliberate practice” in all areas of their music-making. We proceed from the axiom that “auditioning” cannot be defined as a discrete goal-based event, but rather as a *process* incorporating many events over a long period of time. Auditioning is a skill in and of itself. We will explore the best process for honing those skills, enhancing musicianship, and making your practicing the smartest and most efficient it can be (i.e. “deliberate practice”). In short, we will cover all aspects of the audition process from start to finish.

The first part of the course will explore the right attitude with which to approach auditions (the “philosophy” of auditioning), and the reality that nearly all musicians will end up in “audition situations” regardless of whether they are orchestral players, freelancers, Broadway stalwarts, or session players. We will extensively detail the concept of deliberate practice, designating it as an *imperative* – a necessity that any serious musician should embrace, regardless of their goals, career path, or auditions planned.

The second part of the course will focus on implementation: how to employ deliberate practice, manage your time, structure practice sessions, and form good practice habits. We will discuss methods of feedback – e.g., self-recording, archival databases, mock auditions – and how you ultimately must become your own best teacher. We will also address how to dissect excerpts for best practice methods, and guidelines for making smart musical decisions.

The final part of the course will be dedicated to achieving peak performance. We will delve into performance psychology, “state of mind,” and mental conditioning... all of which will be tested via mock auditions. Undergirding this comprehensive approach, we will be reiterating the necessity of embracing *good process* rather than focusing on specific outcomes.

Classes are Tuesdays, 3:30-5:00p, and will be structured to include the following:

- Lecture, presentation, and demonstration.
- Discussion and group problem solving based on questions posed during the presentation.
- Students performing excerpts, masterclass-style. We will collectively analyze the performances, offer feedback, and discuss issues of *process*.
- Wrap-up discussion, questions, and assignments (readings and homework).

You may address me as “Mr. Haaheim” (pronounced HAW-heim).

Course Requirements, Assignments, and Grading:

You are required to attend and participate in all classes. You are responsible for material covered in the lectures and readings. Copies of the presentation material will be available via [NYU Classes](#). If you have questions about the material presented, please email me directly (jrh13@nyu.edu).

In terms of grading, everyone should get an “A” in this class, and I grade extremely leniently. However, I *do* expect everyone to do the work. The assignments are easy, so there are really no legitimate excuses for incomplete assignments at the end of the semester. My position is this: you are all music performance majors, and you should be taking this seriously. Ostensibly, you are committing your life to this career path, and so the focal points of this class should be a high priority.

The lecture/discussion/performance time is an essential part of the course; it complements the reading and assignments. Class attendance will be strictly monitored; unexcused absences will affect your grade. Since there are so few classes, *attendance is essential*. A doctor’s note is required for an excused absence due to illness. A copy of an invitation letter is required for an excused absence due to an audition. Anything else will be determined on a case by case basis. If you have conflicts with another class, ensemble, or audition, you will need to email no less than two weeks in advance so we can find a solution.

Your primary responsibilities will be readings and associated assignments, preparation of excerpts to perform for the class, crafting a self-organized mock-audition for your midterm, preparing for your final mock audition, documenting aspects of your audition preparation process (based on the course material), and delivering your final project.

Grading will comprise:

- 14%** **Attendance**, class participation, and in-class excerpt performance.
- 20%** **Homework Quizzes**: these reading-based assignments (10 total, 2% each, generally multiple choice) will usually be due by 6:00p on the Sunday preceding the next class, coordinated via [NYU Classes](#). See the schedule below for details.
- 20%** **Midterm Assignment**:
 - a. Participation in full class mock-audition, video-recorded. (10%)
[Due to 2020 scheduling, this will actually happen toward the beginning of the semester]
 - b. Accompanying short essay (Midterm Paper), coordinated via NYU Classes. (10%)
- 46%** **Final Project**:
 - a. Audition preparation mp3 archive of a minimum of 2 excerpts, with at least 4 takes each, spanning the time frame of March 31st through May 10th. The progression of these takes should demonstrate improvement. All mp3 files must include “domain specific knowledge” and progress-tracking data to-be-discussed. Further requirements and format to be discussed in class, and subsequently posted via NYU classes. (10%)

Sample:

EXCERPT A	EXCERPT B
Take #1a, ~March 31st	Take #1b, ~March 31st
Take #2a, ~April 10 th	Take #2b, ~April 10 th
Take #3a, ~April 25th	Take #3b, ~April 25th
Take #4a, ~May 9th	Take #4b, ~May 9th

- b. Self-organized mock audition video. Requirements and structure to be discussed in class, and subsequently posted via NYU classes. (10%)
- c. Duhigg “changing a bad practice habit” exercise (6%)
- d. Final Paper. Themes and requirements to be discussed in class, and posted via NYU classes. (10%)
- e. Last day of class, in-class blind mock audition participation. (10%)

Required Reading and Resources:

- Geoff Colvin: [Talent is Overrated](#)
- Anders Ericsson: [Peak](#)
- Charles Duhigg: [The Power of Habit](#)
- Student’s personal laptop computer with audio/video editing freeware (to-be-discussed), and iTunes (or other mp3 organizer)
- Access to an audio recording device (e.g., Zoom, Tascam, etc.)
- Basic tools: tuner, metronome, and practice mirror

These are three books that I believe every serious musician should read. Please take the material seriously. Read with real focus. Take notes for yourself. Write in the margins. These books were utterly transformative for me, and they can be for you too. Also, **get ahead on the reading**. Do it ahead of time. (You can also get ahead on the homework quizzes; all are accessible beginning the first day of class.) Having relatively few classes distributed throughout the semester necessitates an uneven workload distribution. Some weeks will require more time than others. This mimics an auditioning musician’s life, so get ahead on the work when you can!

Extra Credit:

I fully understand how busy everyone is in school; that's why these augmenting materials are not required reading. But they're nevertheless important for your career as a musician. I highly recommend reading them at some point...and if you need extra credit, all the better. (I'd like to think that the *serious* musicians among you will read some of these even if your grade is already 100%.) Extra credit assignments can be drawn from any of the following:

- Timothy Gallwey: [The Inner Game of Tennis](#)
- Don Greene: [Performance Success](#)
- Eckhart Tolle: [The Power of NOW](#)
- Noa Kageyama: Articles on [Deliberate Practice](#) or [Performance Anxiety](#)
- Christopher Bergland: [The Neurobiology of Grace Under Pressure](#)
- Cal Newport: [Deep Work](#)
- Cal Newport: [Digital Minimalism](#)
- Matthew Syed: [Bounce](#)
- Daniel Coyle: [The Talent Code](#)
- Daniel Coyle (nytimes): [How to Grow a Super-Athlete](#) (in-depth discussion of myelin)
- Jason Haaheim: [Articles on Deliberate Practice](#)
- Popova/Goleman: [What it ACTUALLY Takes to Reach Excellence](#)
- Popova/Dweck: [The Growth Mindset](#)
- Pennington (nytimes): [Shiffrin's Ascent](#)
- Pennington (nytimes): [Shiffrin Reaches the Pinnacle](#)
- Ira Glass: [THE GAP](#)
- Jeff Bridges and Bernie Glassman: [The Dude and the Zen Master](#)
- Lara Boyd: TedX talk on [Neuroplasticity](#)

For the articles, a 400-word short essay on its major themes and how they relate to your work in this class can add up to 2% to your final grade. For any of the books, a 400 word short essay the major themes of at least one chapter (and how that chapter relates to your work in this class) can add up to 2% to your final grade.

Calibrating Expectations:

From the past six times I've taught this course, I've gotten extremely helpful feedback from students. I believe it's helped me make the course better and more effective. It's also helped me realize the importance of calibrating expectations going in. So I want to be clear about what I'm setting out to do, and maybe more helpfully, what I'm *not* setting out to do.

My intention is to provide the kind of material I wish I'd had 13 years ago when I started seriously taking auditions. This material derives from my unorthodox path to the MET Orchestra: I was appointed principal timpanist in 2013; prior to that, I worked for 10 years as a senior scientist at a nanotechnology company in Chicago. I double-majored in physics and music as an undergraduate, and I earned a master's degree in electrical engineering. I did not attend a conservatory, nor do I hold a graduate degree in music. But for me, that has all turned out to be a powerful asset – I feel that I've gained unique insight into the mutually-reinforcing realms of science and music, particularly in terms of how to engineer an audition process and what it *really* means to practice. So, while I did not attend a conservatory, I crafted my own experience that closely simulated it...and in some ways exceeded it. I did so by embracing the tenets of “deliberate practice,” a bedrock concept of this course. Deliberate practice research supports the following axiom: if there even is such a thing as “natural talent,” it becomes irrelevant over the time it takes to “get really good.” The far more dominant factors are both how much you practice, but more importantly the *quality* of that practice.

This class is unique. To my knowledge, this kind of course does not exist anywhere else. I'm passionate about teaching it because I intend to address what I perceive to be a gap in many musicians' training: an honest assessment of what it *really* takes to be a successful musician, including a comprehensive approach to audition-taking and a substantive and research-based approach to practicing. I've crafted the class with these emphases because I believe this comprehensiveness can easily be left untouched in formal music training. Moreover, there's usually a major disconnect between “what you think you need to know” when you're an undergrad/masters student, and the later realization of “what you actually needed to know” when you're further into your career. I intend to address the latter.

I've designed this class to be augmenting rather than distracting. When approached correctly, it should enhance all of your musical projects and practice, rather than suck away valuable time. (As stated above, I've designed it to be an "easy A.") This class should begin to change your trajectory; it should make you *better at getting better*. In general, the question I want students to ask themselves is not "am I good enough right now?" but rather "am I willing to do the work?" The focus and intensity of that work determines your trajectory, and that is by far the most important thing.

This will not be a class that "gives you a bag of tricks" and then sends you on your way. This will *not* be me spouting a bunch of miscellaneous and unrelated bits of advice, nor me (or another faculty member) playing a bunch of excerpts and saying "just do it like that." Since previous students have been somewhat confused on this point, I want to make it as clear as possible: this is *not* a rep class. This does *not* substitute for studio class. This is *not* where you'll learn the core audition excerpts for your instrument, nor is it about playing a ton and getting feedback from *me*; we haven't nearly the time required, and that's what your lessons and studio classes are for.

Instead, I try to approach this material with a comprehensive *methodology*. We will discuss how you can get the most out of your lessons with the dedicated experts of your instrument.; we'll highlight how to approach each lesson from a standpoint of problem solving rather than diagnosis, and how to mine your teacher's wisdom for maximum value. Excerpts will serve as examples so that you can ultimately teach yourself how to learn and refine the rest of that massive repertoire. I want to train you how to play for yourself and your peers, and how to get useful feedback that way; class assignments will have you crafting your own effective mock auditions. We will discuss the importance of playing a lot of mock auditions, but especially understanding the WHY of what you're doing and how you will do it best on your own *once you're out of school*. But most importantly, we will focus on developing your framework for making musical decisions, thereby *helping you ultimately become your own best teacher*.

To reiterate: *I am not here to listen to your mock auditions. I am here to teach you how to structure your own most productive mock auditions, and be your own best teacher.*

Now, to the extent that there are assignments and homework, they exist because:

- a. This is a for-credit class. I need *something* on which to base your grade, and demonstrating accountability is a fundamental skill in any music career. And,
- b. These are things that *I* desperately needed to know when I was getting serious about being a musician. This is the class I would give myself if I could go back in time to 2007. This is the material that would have saved me years of inefficient fumbling. These are the books and concepts that radically improved *my* trajectory – that took me from being a timpanist with potential and good intentions (but basically a hack) to being the principal timpanist of one of the finest orchestras in the world, having won what is universally recognized as one of the fairest audition processes in the western hemisphere.

I only point this out because some students in previous classes have grouched about having "too much reading and not enough mock auditioning." I get it. Homework is a drag, and you just want to be able to play. However, two big points on this:

1. It is not enough to just *feel* the music at people real hard. As Brahms said, "without craftsmanship, inspiration is a mere reed shaken in the wind." Deliberate practice is about understanding those tools of craftsmanship, and dedicating yourself to the refinement of that craft.
2. Refining your craft is hard. It's not always fun. It can be painful. It will be exhausting. It requires intelligence and knowledge. If you continue in a music career for any length of time, you will realize that there is *a lot* of learning and growth that will need to take place...and a lot of that knowledge is contained in books. I have previously encountered the mentality "but I'm an *artist* – I don't need book learning"...and that is total nonsense: if you view these assignments as irrelevant distractions, you may want to reconsider this career path. Please trust me: these readings will benefit you. You should come to realize that the readings, assignments, and course requirements are *things you should already be doing if you're a serious music student*. The readings will augment your other musical efforts. It may occasionally seem like being

forced to “eat your vegetables,” but then again I’m not here to feed you candy for dinner -- I’m here to address the serious, aspiring, and dedicated musicians among you, and to give you the best possible tools to succeed in the long run.

Moreover, I will be unflinching in addressing the realities of becoming a professional musician. Taken seriously, it is more grueling than a syllabus can possibly convey. Having gone through an elite undergraduate physics program, earned a graduate degree from a top tier engineering school, and spent 10 years as a professional nanotechnologist, believe me when I say “that was all *easier* than becoming a professional timpanist.” Making the transition from science to music required enormous intrinsic motivation. But while science was easier, it was also far less fulfilling for me. So we will also spend time digging into the WHY of this career path. As music performance majors, you surely encounter people in your life who believe our artistic pursuits are frivolous, or who denigrate the importance of meaningful musical work. They may ask “Why are you doing this?” I believe there are right answers to that question, and there are wrong ones, and we will tackle them all.

Finally, every top-level musician I know embraced some variation of these concepts during their development. For some of you, though, I realize this approach might not be what you’re used to. You may prefer a “just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it” approach. That is not me, and that is not what I offer. Give yourself an honest self-assessment and ask, “Do I want to approach my musical practice with consistent analytical rigor, emphasizing self-accountability?” If not, this class is not for you. But if it is, I’m eager and excited to work with you.

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from homework assignments based on reading, to preparation of excerpt materials, to the delivery of your final project. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others, and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours. When taking this class, you enter into a contract which states that all the work you are turning in has been your own and no one else’s (no plagiarism), that you have not turned in any work for which you have received credit in another class (without prior permission), and that you have properly cited other people’s work and ideas. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade. If you have questions about these policies, please contact me.

SCHEDULE, READINGS, and ASSIGNMENTS:

PART I: FRAMING AND DEFINING THE PROCESS OF AUDITIONS

Class #1, Tuesday, 1/28/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: What is Your Philosophy of Auditioning?

Assigned Reading: Colvin: Chapters 1-4

Homework Quiz #1: due Sunday, 2/2, 6p

Class #2, Tuesday, 2/4/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: What is deliberate practice? (part 1)

Assigned Reading: Colvin: Chapters 5-8

Homework Quiz #2: due Sunday, 2/9, 6p

Class #2.1, Tuesday, 2/11/2020, 3:30-4:30 pm: Millman research presentation #1

Assigned Reading: Colvin: Chapters 9-11

Homework Quiz #3: due Sunday, 2/16, 6p

Class #2.2, Tuesday, 2/18/2020, 3:30-4:30 pm: Millman research presentation #2

Assigned Reading: Ericsson: Author’s Note + Introduction + Chapters 1-3

Homework Quiz #4: due Sunday, 2/23, 6p

Class #2.5, Tuesday, 2/25/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: “MIDTERM” MOCK AUDITION (Midterm Assignment Part A)

Assigned Reading: Ericsson: Chapters 4-5

Homework Quiz #5: due Sunday, 3/1, 6p

Class #3, Tuesday, 3/3/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: What is deliberate practice? (part 2)
 Assigned Reading: Ericsson: Chapters 6-7
 Homework Quiz #6: due Sunday, 3/8, 6p

Class #4, Tuesday, 3/10/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: What is deliberate practice? (part 3)
 Assigned Reading: Ericsson: Chapters 8-9
 Homework Quiz #7: due Sunday, 3/22, 6p
 Midterm Assignment: due Sunday, 3/22, 6p ... MIDTERM PAPER (Midterm Assignment Part B)

[NYU spring break break 3/14-22/2020]

Class #5, Tuesday, 3/24/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: How do you *want* to sound? (Mental Representations)
 Assigned Reading: Duhigg: Prologue + Chapters 1-3
 Homework Quiz #8: due Sunday, 3/29, 6p

PART II: IMPLEMENTATION: FROM INTENTIONS TO FOLLOW-THROUGH

Class #6, Tuesday, 3/31/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: How do you give yourself feedback?
 Assigned Reading: Duhigg: Chapters 4-7
 Homework Quiz #9: due Sunday, 4/5, 6p
 FINAL PROJECT Part A: due Sunday, 5/10, 6p: Audition Preparation mp3 Archive

Class #7, Tuesday, 4/7/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: How can you become your own best teacher?
 Assigned Reading: Duhigg: Chapters 8-9 + afterword + appendix
 Homework Quiz #10: due Sunday, 4/14, 6p
 FINAL PROJECT Part C: due Sunday, 5/10, 6p: Duhigg “changing a bad practice habit” exercise (note: this will take a minimum of 7 days, so plan ahead!)

Class #8, Tuesday, 4/14/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: How do you develop an *achievable* practice plan?
 Assigned Reading & Viewing:

- Watch [Somm](#)
- Read Dr. Filer Beta Blockers Interview (posted on NYU Classes)

 FINAL PROJECT Part B: due Sunday, 5/10, 6p: Self-Organized Mock Audition

Class #9, Tuesday, 4/21/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: How do you establish good practice habits? (part 1)
 FINAL PROJECT Part D: due Sunday, 5/10, 6p: FINAL PAPER

Class #10, Tuesday, 4/28/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: How do you establish good practice habits? (part 2)
 Assignment: *continue working on your final projects!*

PART III: EXECUTION AND MENTAL CONDITIONING (*THE AUDITION*)

Class #11, Tuesday, 5/5/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: How do you achieve peak performance when it *counts*?
 Assignment: *continue working on your final projects, and prepare for your blind mock final!*

Class #11.5, Tuesday, 5/12/2020, 3:30-5:00 pm: **BLIND MOCK AUDITIONS** (FINAL PROJECT Part E)