

Courtesy of MMEA Western District in Massachusetts, edited by Alex Shapiro:

Audio/Video Submission Instructions

For musicians recording their part at home

Overview:

You will need 2 devices (computer, tablet, cellphone, video camera, mp3 player, etc.) and a pair of headphones or earbuds. One device will be for recording/filming, and one will be for playing back the accompaniment track with which you'll play along.

The most common method is to use a cell phone for filming the video, and a tablet or computer to play the accompaniment track as you record. If you have the equipment necessary to record your audio separately—with an external microphone, and recording software on your computer such as Audacity, Soundtrap, Garage Band, etc., submit a separate audio file because it will most likely be better quality. Otherwise, your mobile device should have the ability to create high enough quality audio to be acceptable.

Recording Video:

Set your device to record in 1080p at 30fps. For iPhone Users: go to “Settings” then “Camera”, and set “Formats” to “Most Compatible”.

Record your video in landscape mode (horizontally) ← → .

Be sure to capture yourself from the waist up, and be as centered in the frame as possible.

Make sure your face and instrument are clearly visible (cello/bass, be sure to capture your bow, fingers). Singers can face the camera straight on. Instrumentalists can play slightly angled away from the camera. If possible, coordinate with the rest of your section on which direction you should be facing (example: tuba players should face the direction that shows their fingers best). Facing straight ahead might make more sense for some instruments as well.

Try to film with good lighting that comes from in front of you, rather than backlighting (a window with sunlight coming in from behind you is not ideal).

Ensure that there's nothing that will be in the camera frame that you wouldn't want everyone to see!

Be sure to shoot test footage to check everything.

Most of the time, the accompaniment track with which you will be recording will have a count-in of a predetermined number of “free clicks”. Your ensemble director will ask you to clap or speak on the downbeat of a particular count-in beat, for video syncing purposes.

Please wait until the accompaniment track stops playing at the end of the piece—including ring-out after the final beat!—before you stop filming. If there is no click at the end, just wait for a few seconds. After you finish playing your last note, you can look at the camera and smile until the end.

In live performance, you only have one chance to play well, but in a recording project such as this, should you make any errors or wish to improve your recording, you have the wonderful opportunity to go back and create as many “takes” as you wish until the result pleases you. Submit only the best one, not multiple versions. Hold yourself to the highest possible standard, knowing that many people will hear the final product, and that your contribution is important. Be sure to record several practice takes, and watch and listen back to see how everything looks and sounds.

Recording Audio:

Each instrument produces sound differently, so the ideal mic placement depends on the instrument. Be very careful to place the microphone—whether the internal one on your phone or laptop, or an external one—at a proper distance. This will require a few tests to determine what will sound best. You want to avoid recording your instrument too loudly and thus clipping and distorting the digital sound, and you also want to ensure your recording doesn’t come out too softly to register properly.

When listening back to your test recording, make sure the loudest parts of the music are not distorting. If they are, you will need to adjust the placement of your device/mic or turn down the input gain control if that is a possibility with your configuration.

Experiment and do your own research on how to best capture your audio (especially if you are using a separate mic for recording). If you are using the same device for audio and video and are having a difficult time getting good sound with the position you have your camera in, try capturing your audio from a different location in a separate take without worrying about the video portion, and submit one file for the audio and another one for the video. Better yet, if you have an external mic, set it up to record as you also record the video with sound, so that there will be a synchronized audio track that can be matched to the video. If you are submitting separate audio and video files, please label them accordingly.

Be sure to tune your instrument before you start recording, and keep the tuner handy throughout the process.

You will want to record in the quietest possible environment available to you, with as little background noise as possible. Microphones pick up everything!

Make sure the accompaniment track is not audible in your recording.

Apps such as Spire for IOS and Smart Recorder for Android offer higher quality audio recording directly to your smartphone if that is something you would like to try.

Video (and Audio) Submission:

Please rename your files to this file name format:

Part_SongName_FirstInitialLastName.mov (or .mp4)

Example:

Alto1_TightSqueeze_AComposerini.mov

Congratulations!

You have recorded and produced a music track and video! In addition to your abilities as an instrumentalist or singer, these technical skills will be useful to you throughout your life, for many different circumstances. Musicians from centuries ago would have loved to have been able to document their performances! Now, you can do so any time you wish. Have a great time!