

Five “Do’s” and One “Don’t”: How to Find (and be accepted at) the Right College for You

By Anne Sullivan

The biggest challenge high school music students face is often the search for the perfect college. The process can be daunting and frustrating, but there are some things you can do to make this difficult time less stressful. In fact, if you follow these five easy “do’s” and one important “don’t,” you will be able to feel more relaxed and confident about making your decision.

1. **Do your research.** You know the usual things guidance counselors tell you to consider in a college or university: size, location, campus life, and cost among others. But as a music student, how do you know which schools and teachers will help you meet your musical goals? Start by asking yourself which performers you admire, or which have the kind of musical careers that appeal to you. Then find out who their teachers were, and where they went to school. The internet is your best source for quick information, but most people will respond helpfully to a polite email request from an admirer. You may find out that certain teachers or schools have trained a number of successful musicians on your list. These are schools you should be considering. After all, if they trained the musicians you admire, they would probably be good matches for your goals and your style.
2. **Do meet the teacher.** Most teachers will be willing to meet with students who are considering their schools. Often they will even give you a mini-lesson. Arrange for this well in advance of your audition date, so that you have a chance to respond to suggestions that the teacher may make. This is a great opportunity to find out a little about a teacher’s instructional style and get an idea of how your personalities might blend. Even better, at your audition, you have the added confidence that comes from playing for someone you already know. But perhaps the biggest benefit is that the teacher already knows you and knows how you would fit into his or her studio. This can make the difference between your being accepted, or being wait-listed or even rejected. After all, the teacher has a limited number of open spots to fill, and is more likely to choose someone she knows than someone she doesn’t.
3. **Do prepare the right audition repertoire.** If there is specific repertoire required for the audition, make sure that you prepare it. If you prepare something other than what is required, you run the risk of looking either dumb or disrespectful, neither of which is a good start for a college career. Occasionally it may happen that you have prepared a piece for other auditions that is similar to a required piece. You may email the teacher well in advance of the audition to see if the substitution would be acceptable, but be prepared to perform the required piece if he insists on it.
4. **Do know who has the power to admit you.** It often comes as an unpleasant surprise to students that even though they played a spectacular audition and the teacher has expressed interest in teaching them, they still are rejected by the college. Frequently, the ultimate decision for admission is out of the hands of the teacher, or even of the music department. Many colleges and universities require a minimum GPA and sometimes even a particular selection of high

school courses for admission, and even the music department cannot supersede these rules. Both colleges where I teach have similar requirements, and I have seen prospective students frustrated that their abilities on the harp have not outweighed a middling GPA or poor SAT scores. Ask the teacher or the admissions department and find out what the criteria for admission are, and how much the audition counts in the process.

5. **Do complete all the paperwork and return it on time.** Filling out all the appropriate forms and forwarding all the transcripts and test scores is a nuisance, but a small one compared to the frustration of losing a chance at a great school because your form was late. You've spent all these years practicing; you deserve every opportunity to put that hard work to good use. Know your deadlines and stay on track.
6. **And now the "don't": Don't think this is the end of the world.** It may feel like this is the biggest decision you will ever have to make, but it isn't. Not even close. There are other colleges in the world, if you need to change schools. There are summer camps; there is even graduate school. In other words, there are plenty of opportunities and choices that will still be open to you. But since you have done your best to make this choice wisely, you will have a great chance at an educational and fun time at college. Enjoy it!