



ROYAL
BIRMINGHAM
CONSERVATOIRE

AUDITION RECORDING GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

We understand that making an audition recording will be a new experience for many of our applicants so we want to help. The Virtual RBC team have prepared this guide to help you record audio and video for your audition.

This guide will give you some introductory knowledge on how to record audio and video at home with a range of different equipment. Some equipment will yield better results than others, however the purpose of this guide is to help you get a recording of a video that can be used to assess your performance for audition purposes.

We understand that our applicants may not have access to advanced equipment and that's ok. An advanced recording is not necessary and won't give you an edge over other applicants. We are looking for potential as evidenced in your performance and will make allowances for different recording quality. The most important thing is your performance.



GETTING STARTED

SET UP YOUR SPACE

First you must make your recording space ready to record. This means making enough space for you the performer and your equipment. Depending on what equipment you have at your disposal you may require more or less space.

LIGHTING

You will also want to ensure that your lighting is positioned correctly. It's best not to stand directly under or with your light source behind you, whether this is a window, ceiling light or lamp. We advise recording in the daylight and having your largest light source directly in front of you to avoid any shadows. You may also want to increase the brightness of your room with lamps and other light sources. Low light can blur the video. Musicians we need to see your face, hands and upper body clearly and Actors your whole body should be in shot if possible.

CHECK DEVICE FUNCTIONALITY

After you have set the space and equipment you will need to check functionality of the devices. Simply record a short part of the piece you will record, then review its quality. Continue this, adjusting any microphones and camera until you get the best possible capture with them.

SOUND AND VIDEO CHECK

This is the most important part before you perform. Make sure that what you are recording is at the highest possible quality. Record short tests, then review and adjust. If possible, monitor audio with headphones as small device speakers do not replicate recorded sound accurately.



QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Here is a summary for you to use as a quick reference:

- Prepare recording space
- Setup recording device(s)
- Test record each piece
- Review test with headphones
- Adjust equipment if needed
- Test record and review again
- Record Piece
- Backup and send files

COMMON DEVICES

SMART PHONE / TABLET

One of the most common devices that people own is a smart phone or tablet. Using the inbuilt camera, these can be used to record a video, and depending on the model, can get very good captures. They are also one of the easiest ways to record something. Getting a good capture will require multiple sound and video checks as most controls over the video and audio are usually not available to the user.

In short, you will be altering the distance from the performer to the smartphone/tablet so that the audio does not distort. Then using its cameras zoom function ensuring that all relevant parts of the performance are in shot. Ensure that your face and all relevant parts of the instrument and your body are clearly in shot (e.g. face, piano keys, arms and fingers). It's best to shoot in landscape mode so that your audition video takes up the width of a screen and you may need to adjust your lighting so that you are clearly in shot.

Start by ensuring that you have enough space on your device to record for as long as you need to. Most recordings will not need to be HD or 4K. Standard definition should suffice and will allow a longer record duration. If you are running out of space on your device, you may need to back up some other files such as videos, photos, and audio in order to make space for your recording.

Next set up the phone or tablet pointing towards where you will be performing. Use the camera at the back of the device if possible. Then record a short part of the piece that you will be playing, stop the recording and review how it sounds and looks. When reviewing this short test, it is important that you use headphones to monitor the audio, as speakers on tablets or smartphones do not tend to give the most accurate sound.

After reviewing this, move the device closer or further away depending on how the test sounds and looks. You may need to adjust camera angle or zoom in order to capture everything that is needed to be seen. You may also need to move the device closer or further away depending on how the audio sounds. If the audio is distorting or clipping then you will need to move the device further away and adjust the camera angle, if it is too quiet and difficult to hear, move it closer. You may need to repeat this process multiple times in order to get the best possible recording. After you are happy with how things are looking and sounding, record your piece.

TIP - BACK UP YOUR VIDEO

When you've finished recording your piece or film, take the file and make a copy of it in another device or back it up to the cloud. Google Drive, One Drive or Dropbox are all good options.



VIDEO CAMERAS

Video cameras can vary in features and functionality. Some of them can function like smartphones or tablets, while others will allow you to add microphones and attachments, in order to supplement your recording.

Most video cameras will allow you to access options that smart phones and tablets do not have, such as gain, compression, and equalisation for audio, and white balance, file type and frame rate for video. You should check the device manual to access these features. Most have dedicated stereo microphones in built, which tend to be better than a smart phones microphone.

If your camera has an external microphone input, refer to its manual and how to use it. Microphone position will depend on what microphone you are using and what you are recording.

If you have access to audio controls such as gain or compression, you can alter them in order to stop distortion/clipping or to boost the microphones sensitivity.

TIP – CHECK YOUR AUDIO

Most cameras will have a playback function and a headphone port. Check the audio with headphones in order to accurately assess its quality.

If your video camera does not have external mic input, then use it as you would a smartphone or tablet, checking the audio after short tests.

Most video cameras will allow you to choose what file type that the camera records to, usually between AVCI or MP4. We recommend recording to MP4 as its compatible with most software and platforms. Video cameras almost always record to a SD card. After recording, take the files from your SD card and back them up.

WEBCAM

If you have a computer with a webcam you can use this to record. Most Webcams will have an integrated microphone. In order to record using a webcam you may need to download some software to do so.

[OBS \(Open Broadcast Software\)](#) is a free application for Mac and PC that will allow you to record video files direct from your web cam. Remember to test audio and video before recording.

AUDIO INTERFACE AND MICROPHONE

Audio interfaces enable multi microphone recordings. Each microphone can be recorded separately, allowing for more control over the final mix. If you are also recording video, you may need to add the audio recording to it later, using video editing software.

Download and install any device drivers that the audio interface may need. Connect the device to the computer. You should be able to see the audio interface in the computers list of sound devices.

Download and install a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) and select your audio interface as the input and output device. Depending on what instrument you are recording will determine where to position your microphones. Sound check, monitor and adjust position and gain for best results. If working with video, it is best to export the audio at a sample rate of 48kHz, and a bit depth of 16 bit (video standard).

MICROPHONES

DYNAMIC MICROPHONES

These microphones are the simplest to use. You can get quite good directionality from them and are excellent when positioned quite close to the source of sound. low frequencies increase through closer proximity. These are mostly used as solo or spot microphones as they can withstand very loud sounds and are less sensitive than condenser microphones.



CONDENSER MICROPHONES

All condenser microphones require “Phantom Power”, which is power supplied to the microphone through the cable from the interface. Phantom power can be identified by a 48V (48 volts) option or button.

Condenser microphones come in two common types: Pencil (or small diaphragm) and Large diaphragm. Condensers are commonly used as overhead or room microphones as their sensitivity allows them to capture detail at greater distances than dynamic microphones. Some will allow you to change the directionality of the sound, from directional (cardioid) or non-directional (omni).

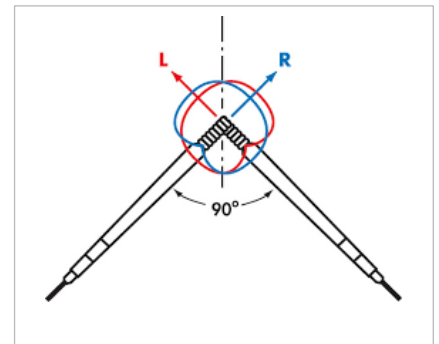


STEREO MICROPHONE TECHNIQUES

Stereo recordings replicate the distance and space between instruments or parts of instruments in a left to right field. If you have access to 2 microphones (of the same model) you may want to consider setting up a stereo array to record your piece. These can vastly simplify a recording, while still getting broadcast quality results. This can be used to record ensembles or to cover large instruments (such as piano or percussion).

XY PAIR

With a pair of directional (cardioid) mics, Point them 90 degrees apart with the axis on the recording end of the mic. Position this array so that the subject of recording is in between each microphone. Set one microphone to the left and the other to the right. This produces a recording that has stereo depth but with more emphasis towards the centre.



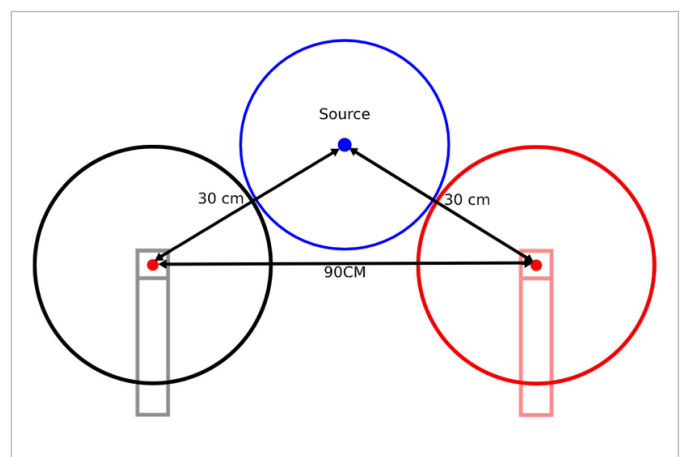
AB/ SPACED PAIR

With a pair of omni directional mics place them apart on a ratio of 3:1 from the recording source.

For example, if you have positioned the first mic at 30cm from the source, the microphones should be 90cm apart from each other and at the same height.

Set one microphone to left and the other to right.

This can result in a very wide sounding recording that also picks up details from the acoustics of the recording space.



REMEMBER

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However, if you are concerned at all about the technology you have access to for your audition, please get in touch, we'll be happy to help: conservatoire.admissions@bcu.ac.uk



TERMINOLOGY

BIT DEPTH

The resolution of volume that is being recorded. Smaller bit depths will have less dynamic range, larger bit depths will allow for more detailed volume differences.

COMPRESSION

An automatic gain reducer. It turns loud sounds down.

DAW (DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION)

Audio recording and editing software. Examples include Logic Pro, Garage Band, Pro Tools and [Reaper \(free\)](#).

DISTORTION

Unwanted harmonics caused by an over-sensitive microphone. Also referred to as clipping, this will lower the clarity of an audio recording

EQUALIZATION

A function that alters the intensity of selected audio frequencies for example, increasing the bass (low frequencies) or reducing the treble (mid-high frequencies).

GAIN

The sensitivity of a microphone

SAMPLE RATE

The rate at which audio data is stored. For example, 48kHz records 48000 points of audio data every second in order to replicate the sound that is being reproduced. Higher sample rates have a higher resolution of audio.

VOLUME

How loud a recorded sound or speaker is.

ZOOM

How close a camera lens is focused on a subject.