

DRUM LESSONS IN LA.COM

How to Get the Gig (Dealing with Auditions)

Whether you're auditioning for a local band, national tour, or a recording session, auditions are a part of being a musician. The reasons why we sometimes don't get the gig are not always in our control, but here are some tips that may help you with the auditioning process.

PREPARATION

Find out what is expected of you before the audition. Are there certain songs they want you to learn? If so, make sure you can play those songs well, knowing all of the changes and breaks. Unfortunately, it is all too common for musicians not to learn the songs they have been given for their auditions. Many musicians assume that their talent alone will get them the gig, but if you are asked to learn specific songs, the band will most likely judge your playing by how well you can play their music. (If you really want to make an impression, learn as many of the band's songs as you can and let them know that you can also play those songs.)

If they tell you that you don't have to play the songs exactly as they are on the recording and you are free to make the song your own, let your personality come through without changing the essential parts. For example, if a fill mimics the rhythm of the melody in the song, it would be best to keep it in. Keep in mind that the parts were most likely played that way for a reason and the band may be used to hearing them that way. Resist the temptation to overplay. If you really want to show off your chops, ask them if they would like you to prepare a drum solo for the audition.

I find it helpful to make charts of the songs that I am learning even if I won't be reading them at the audition. Reading charts at the audition may or may not be appropriate, but making notes that I can quickly glance at while I am playing can help.

If you will be playing to prerecorded music at the audition, make sure you can hear it well. Playing to tracks feels different than playing with live musicians. Make sure you have a monitor nearby or bring headphones that you can plug into their system.

If given the choice of when to audition on a certain day, it may help to be the first (or the last) person they try out. If they have to audition a bunch of people, it can be difficult for them to remember everyone. They will generally remember the first and the last one best. Sometimes they don't even get through everyone if they hear a player they really like, so try to be earlier than later. If that's not possible though, don't worry about it. Just do your best.

COMMUNICATION

Make sure you ask about important details regarding what they are looking for before you get to the audition. Do they need someone who is not playing with anyone else or are they looking for someone who can go on tour at a moment's notice? Are they

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looking for a permanent band member or a fill in / hired gun? (Do try to keep the conversation brief though if you are speaking to them on the phone, as they will probably have to talk to many other people after you). This information will help you decide if you really want the gig. If something about their terms bothers you, that may subconsciously affect how well you prepare and play if you decide to take the audition.

Pay can be a tricky subject to discuss before they offer you the gig. It can come across as rude to ask, but it may be an important factor if you are auditioning for a “musician for hire” gig. I usually will ask what the budget for the musicians is on this job.

Make sure you ask what gear you are required to bring, if any, and bring the right gear for the job. A big double bass drum kit is probably not appropriate for a jazz trio dinner band.

Take into consideration what the band looks like. Wear appropriate clothing that makes you look like you fit in. Image can be a big issue, but even if it isn't, looking like you belong in the band helps your chances. That goes for your instrument also. If you are auditioning for a heavy metal band, don't bring the drum set with pictures of bright flowers and rainbows all over it.

ATTITUDE

Your personality goes a long way in playing music with others. No one wants to be around an unpleasant person. Check your negativity when you go in for auditions. Even if everyone else around you is complaining or being negative, don't give in to the temptation to do the same. Having said that, don't try too hard to please either. You don't want to come off as fake or desperate. Just be you and do what you do. Introduce yourself and get on with it.

Like I mentioned in the beginning, sometimes the reasons we don't get the gig are out of our control. It could be that they had three really good players of equal skill to choose from and they picked someone else, or it could be that they picked the singer's best friend. Don't take rejections personally but try to assess how the audition went and what you could do better next time. Record the audition so you can hear how you did. The more auditions you do, the better you get at doing them.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Be on time. No, actually, get there early. It can help your nerves if you give yourself plenty of time to get there and get situated.

And lastly, auditions can be a good source for networking with other musicians. That includes the musicians who are auditioning with you and the musicians you are auditioning for. Have business cards with you and give them out when appropriate.

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