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General Auditioning Tips for the 2009 Iowa All-State Festival

Your job is to go into a room you've never been in before, to play in front of some people you probably don't know for a few short minutes. These people will decide whether or not you're going to make the All State Festival this year. Just describing the process is really scary for most people. But there are a few things you can do to make your job a little easier.

General practice tips

Practice extremely slowly at first: it's much faster and easier to learn these pieces right the first time than it is to relearn the right notes after you've practiced the wrong ones. Work on the measures that give you the most trouble **FIRST** in your practice session. Circle them so that you remember where they are. Play them five times in a row – can you do this without making any mistakes? If so, you're ready to work on the rest of the piece.

Playing is not practicing. If you play through these etudes for two hours a day with wrong notes, you are much worse off than practicing for an hour a day with all the correct notes. Set a goal for yourself to get just a little bit better at these etudes every day and then actually work on the problem spots. Work with a metronome and gradually move the tempo up as you gain skill, but don't play any faster than you can play with 100% accuracy.

The trombone uses air up very quickly, particularly in the low register. Taking in as much air as you can with every breath is crucial for good trombone playing. Mark in your breaths and don't be afraid to breathe often (but in musically intelligent spots). Finally, most high school trombonists have terrible slides on their horn. If your slide doesn't "glide", you are seriously limiting the amount of technique you execute. Get your slide cleaned, fixed, and well lubricated, and you will be amazed at how much easier it is to play.

Practice the audition

Part of the reason why auditions are scary is because they are unfamiliar. But they don't have to be unfamiliar: you can give yourself practice auditions ahead of time. Your All State Festival audition will take place, most likely, in a classroom at a high school. You will play a minute from a piece of your choice, mostly to get you warmed up for the etudes. Then you will play the etudes. You might play all of them, or only a part of

them. They could be in the order they are in their books, or reversed. Then you will play whatever major scales, two octaves, are asked of you. The tempo will be set by a metronome.

Here are the official audition rules from the Iowa High School Music Association website:

All brass and woodwind entries are required to audition in the following manner:

1. Play a solo of choice (need not be memorized) unaccompanied. The length of the segment you choose should be approximately 1 minute in length; maximum of 1:20.
2. Play the etudes listed below.
3. Play any of the MAJOR scales memorized in two or more octaves where possible, ascending and descending. MAJOR scales must be performed in 16th notes at a metronome speed of quarter note = 88. A Metronome will be used **to establish tempo**. Major scales **must** be performed all tongued ascending and all slurred descending **OR** all slurred ascending and all tongued descending. **NO OTHER ARTICULATION VARIATION WILL BE ACCEPTABLE!!** Either of the following rhythm patterns is



acceptable:

4. Play a chromatic scale over the complete range of the instrument, ascending and descending. Chromatic scales must be performed in 16th notes at a MINIMUM tempo of quarter note = 88. No specific articulation pattern is required.

Knowing these rules, you can now give yourself “mock auditions”. Take your music, horn, and a music stand to a classroom in your school after school hours. Bring along a digital recorder, or invite a friend to listen to you. Then give yourself an audition as outlined above. Start and stop the etudes at random spots. Make up 12 cards, each with a different key of major scale on it, and draw a couple randomly for your scales.

Critique your performance—what went well, what needs work? Do this several times in the two weeks prior to the audition. I guarantee that you will do better in your All State audition than if you have not done this.

If you care about the outcome of your audition, you will get nervous. It’s only human. Here are a few tips for dealing with nervousness:

1. Drink Tension Tamer Tea, made by Celestial Seasonings, an hour before your audition. This really does help calm your body down and lesson the symptoms of nervousness.
2. If you tend to get dry mouth, eat a small piece of chocolate (or some M&Ms) right before your audition. The residual chocolate in your mouth will help you produce saliva.

3. If you still get dry mouth, bite on your tongue to produce saliva.
4. Breathe deeply and in a controlled manner in the minutes before your audition. Breathe in for five counts, hold it for five counts, and breathe out for five counts. This tends to slow down your nervous system.
5. Mentally go through your audition ahead of time. Imagine how the room sounds, smells, what the judges are wearing. Imagine yourself confidently playing at your best, perfectly executing your etudes and scales. Imagine how good you feel about your playing afterwards. These are the exact same techniques used by professional athletes for high performance.
6. Be as prepared as you possibly can. Under-preparation will add significantly to your nervousness.
7. Don't play too much either on the day before or the day of your audition.

Scales

Most high school students play their scales for the All State Festival with considerable sloppiness. Work on them slowly — don't try to play them at $\text{♩}=88$ in sixteenth notes if you can't play them correctly in eighth notes at that tempo. You can always move the tempo up once you gain proficiency; otherwise, you're just reinforcing mistakes. The chromatic scale is particularly tricky on trombone at the tempo set. Most students play something other than the chromatic scale, missing notes along the way. Again, slow, accurate practice is the only way to fast, accurate performance.

Work on the scales that give you the most trouble. You have a limited amount of time to practice; use that time to get better, not stay the same. If you can nail Bb and F, why spend your time doing those over and over? Practice B and F#, then you can do the easy scales.

Not having an f-attachment may seem like a problem, but it isn't. Play the scales you can two octaves, and the others one octave as stated in the All State audition rules: "Play any of the MAJOR scales memorized in two or more octaves *where possible*, ascending and descending". I know of several good high school trombonists who have made it into the All State Festival playing on a straight trombone, so it certainly is possible.

Summary

Set aside practice time every day. Skipping days means that your brain has to reprocess what was learned earlier. Slow, careful practice reinforces excellence, and is the key to fast, accurate performances. Give yourself mock auditions several times before the

actual audition date. Demand the best of yourself and you will progress—you really are your own best coach. Do these things and you will perform your best at the All State Festival auditions.