

# Preparing for a Musical Theatre Audition

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**This guide is intended to provide information for an auditioner who has not yet received formal training in music or is new to the musical side of theatre; there are many ways to discuss the subjects below and the following information represents just one of those many ways.**

## **DETERMINING VOICE TYPE**

**“Voice types” are classifications that reflect the many different kinds of singing voices (low, high, big, small, etc.) Classification can be most helpful when searching for appropriate music, as vocal music is often gathered underneath broad titles such as “soprano” and “baritone.” While there are many classifications available to us, young singers should be careful not to attach themselves to a niche classification prematurely. When a singer is starting out, they should sing what is comfortable!**

There are four basic voice types in Musical Theatre literature; from highest to lowest, they are as follows:

Soprano  
Mezzo  
Tenor  
Baritone

When singing in a choral setting, Mezzos are usually called “Altos” and Baritones are usually called “Basses.” There are choral situations in which the Soprano or Alto lines may be split into several simultaneous lines; if this is the case, Mezzos can often sing the “Soprano II” line as well as the Alto lines. This same principle can be applied to voices that lie between Baritone and Tenor (sometimes called the “Baritenor”); these voices can comfortably sing the Baritone I line or the Tenor II line.

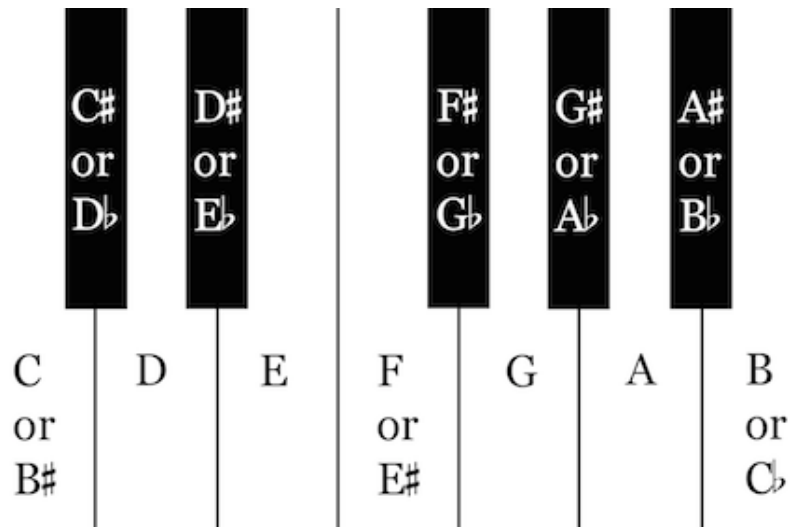
To determine one’s own voice type, singers can try singing along to the following tracks and gauge their comfort level on each (make sure to refer to the Original Cast Albums):

1. Soprano: “Goodnight My Someone” from *The Music Man*
2. Mezzo: “Send in the Clowns” from *A Little Night Music*
3. Tenor: “Go Home With Bonnie Jean” from *Brigadoon*
4. Baritone: “Lonely Room” from *Oklahoma*

Many audition sheets ask that a singer “write down their range.” To do so, singers need the following information:

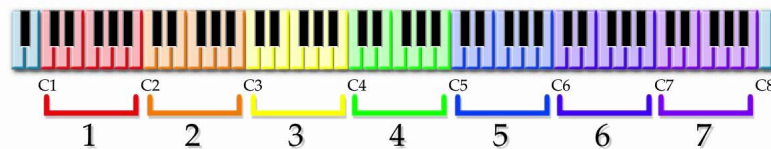
The piano is comprised of the following pattern, which repeats itself along the keyboard seven times (with a little bit of leftover at the beginning and end):

**Diagram A.**



Each iteration of this pattern is labeled with a number from 1-7 with “1” being the lowest octave on the piano and “7” being the highest octave. Remembering that each voice is different and may not fall strictly into any one category, Sopranos generally sing from A3 to E6, Mezzos from F3 to C6, Tenors from A2 to A4, and Baritones from F2 to F4.

**Diagram B.**



If I were to use these diagrams to determine my range, I would do the following:

1. **Go to the piano and begin by playing notes in the center of the keyboard. Try to sing along with the played pitches in an ascending pattern on an “ah” vowel until you discover a note that is at the top of your range.** (Note: your “working range” contains only notes that you are comfortable singing in public. While you might be able to squeak out an F6, it might not be a sound you would want others to hear. This would exclude it from your working range.)

2. **Without removing your finger from your top note, refer to Diagram A. Write down the name of the note.** (Note: If looking at the keyboard feels dizzying, or as though it is difficult to tell notes apart, look at the black keys; they occur in patterns of 2 and 3 and can be helpful visual anchors.)
3. **Refer to Diagram B to determine which numbered octave your note lives in. Write down that number.** (Note: Middle C is C4.)
4. **Repeat this process in a descending pattern to determine your lowest note.**

If in doubt, singers should feel free to consult YouTube or other students who have a working knowledge of the piano.

## CHOOSING MUSIC

**Once a singer has determined their voice type, they can begin the process of searching for music. As with choosing monologues, this process can be both fun and arduous; it may be some years before an actor is able to expediently choose appropriate material. Working actors should listen to as much Musical Theatre as they can to increase their literature knowledge and stay current; Spotify (and other services like it) provides us with many opportunities to hear the newest soundtracks. A good way of clueing into new material is to take a musical theatre album you enjoy and start a radio station based on it; this allows the Spotify algorithm to find you related material.**

Singers should take the following things into consideration when choosing material for an audition:

**\*\*\*NOTE: It is considered gauche to bring in a selection from the show that one is auditioning for *unless it is asked for in the audition call.* \*\*\***

1. **What style is the show in and what time period is it from?**

While the primary consideration should be “do I sound good on this song,” sounding good does not an appropriate selection make. If one is auditioning for a jazzy show from the 40’s, they should bring in a jazzy selection from the same time period; if one is auditioning for *Wicked*, they should bring in something contemporary and belty (and so on and so on.) While some audition classes geared towards non-singing professionals claim that one can bring in selections like “God Bless America” just to prove that they can carry a tune, this is not the case. Auditioners need to show effort and intent to ensure consideration.

## 2. What part am I auditioning for?

While audition calls often provide singers with guidelines, such as “bring in 32 bars of a Golden Age piece,” much of the decision is ours to make. Singers should research the show before they arrive and predetermine what role(s) they are right for. If you are hoping to play a burly mountain man who sings an up-tempo comedy piece in this upcoming show, you should bring in a burly up-tempo comedy piece for your audition.

## 3. Is this piece memorable?

The never-ending discussion of “is this song overdone” can lead a singer around in circles. Rather than thinking “is this song overdone,” one should think, “is this song memorable when I sing it?” If you believe that your selection is very popular and may be presented by more than two people at your upcoming audition call, this begs the question: will the people behind the table remember your rendition of it? If it is not the strongest song in your arsenal, you might consider another song. If you believe that you sing and act the you-know-what out of this song, go ahead and sing it!

## FINDING SHEET MUSIC

Sheet music can be found at the following websites:

1. Musicnotes.com
2. Scribd.com
3. Newmusicaltheatre.com

The library has many musical theatre books available for check out.

\*\*\*The “**Singer’s Musical Theatre Anthology**” book series is the most comprehensive musical theatre series on the market and contains 28 volumes (7 per voice type.) Once you have determined your voice type, seek out the SMTA books from your voice type for good auditioning material. There are even 16-bar cut SMTA books for auditioning!\*\*\*

## PREPARING SHEET MUSIC

**Singers should be sure to bring in properly prepped music for their musical theatre audition to ensure that their audition goes smoothly. Audition pianists often play for 7-8 hours at a time and are hoping to see easy-to-read music with clearly marked cuts and tempos. Difficult looking music can often yield a difficult audition experience.**

## BARS

A “bar” is the visual demarcation that shows the beginning and end of a “measure.” Musical measures are visual ways of organizing music so that musicians can accurately read the notes and rhythms:

**Diagram C.**



When audition calls ask you to bring in “16 bars,” one can literally count the bars to determine the length of their intended selection. It should be noted that the tempo of a selection can often have a large influence over how this particular guideline is enforced. 16 bars of a fast song can often fly by in a matter of seconds, making a 16 bar cut of this particular piece ineffectual for an audition. When a singer sees “16 bars,” they can imagine this to mean, “30 seconds.” If the call asks for “32 bars,” they can imagine this to mean “1 minute.”

## DETERMINING YOUR CUT

Singers should make sure that whatever cut they choose contains a musical beginning, middle, and end. Here are a few possible cuts that apply to many songs in the musical theatre genre:

1. The first or second verse: usually 32 bars
2. The chorus: usually 16-32 bars
3. The “11 o’clock chorus” (usually the last chorus, think the riffy/high chorus at the end of “Defying Gravity): usually 16-32 bars

It should be noted that, whatever your cut, the resulting performance should be “dynamic.” Make sure that the cut serves you as both an actor and a singer!

While this is not a hard and fast rule, I have found that the “bridge” (a.k.a. the slow part about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through the song) does not usually make for a good audition cut.

## MARKING YOUR CUT

1. Singers should denote the beginning and end of their musical cut with brackets in the sheet music, drawn along bars in black pen.
2. The opening bracket should be labeled “start” and the closing bracket should be labeled “end.”
3. There should not be excess marks in the music (acting or blocking notes, singing reminders, memory tricks, etc.)

4. Measures that you wish to exclude in the middle of your cut, if any, should be blacked out rather than crossed through. This is a more advanced technique and novice singers should not worry about this unless assisted by a friend or teacher.
5. Measures that occur before the start bracket or after the end bracket may be “x’ed” out for clarity, but do not necessarily have to be if a singer is trying to preserve their music.

#### Diagram D.

The diagram shows a musical score for a song in G major. The first part of the score, from measure 9 to measure 12, is crossed out with a large red X. A red bracket labeled "START" is placed at the beginning of the second part of the score, which starts at measure 13. The lyrics are: "Like wise the man who works for fame, There's no guar-an-tee that time won't e-raise his name." The chords are: B7, Em7, Am7 D7, G6, F#m, F, E sus4, and A7.

**\*\*\*ALL MUSIC MUST BE PRESENTED IN A BINDER, NO EXCEPTIONS EVER.\*\*\***

#### INTERACTING WITH YOUR PIANIST

It is important to treat the audition pianist with great respect and kindness- the staff behind the table is known to ask the pianist “was so-and-so nice” and the pianist’s response carries great weight in the room. Here are some helpful tips:

1. Say “hello, thank you for playing for me today,” when you approach them, and “goodbye, thanks again,” when you leave.
2. Explain your cut thoroughly- it is appropriate to tap (on your own person and not on the pianist or the piano) your tempo and hum a few bars for the pianist so that they can gauge the overall feel and shape of the piece. Show them the start and end of your cut, and explain any slow-downs or speed-ups in the piece if they occur.
3. Tell the pianist how you plan to start the piece. If you plan to start singing before they start playing, ask them to play your starting pitch and explain that you will begin the

selection. If your piece begins with a “bell tone” or with an acting cue, such as a “gasp,” explain this.

4. When you finish speaking with your pianist, thank them and walk to your mark. Announce your piece to the panel and then prepare to sing. **It is very unprofessional to nod to the pianist.** Rather than nodding to the pianist to begin your selection, spend your time getting into character; there should be a noticeable physical change when you are ready to sing and audition pianists are used to looking for this.

**In summation, remember that all musical theatre is meant to be acted and understood- even a novice singer should be able to live in their material. If a piece is not presented in character, it is not memorable.**

**Happy auditioning!**