

Orchestra Rehearsal Etiquette

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Whether you're in an orchestra for the first time or you're an experienced orchestral performer, you'll soon notice that there are some unwritten "rules" pertaining to your involvement and behavior during rehearsal. Conductors even have their own style and set of expectations for the musicians under their direction.

It's understandable if you feel a little nervous when performing with a new ensemble for the first time. Too bad no one will hand you a copy of *Rehearsal Etiquette for Dummies*. So if you're wondering what to do and how to act in rehearsal, here are a few tips to keep you [in the know](#).

- **Arrive early**—at least 15 minutes early, or with enough time to both get your instrument out and warm up. There is nothing more awkward than shuffling through a crowd of seated musicians in the middle of *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Fawn*. If you are late (it happens), try to avoid taking your seat while the musicians are playing; if you can, wait for an appropriate break in the action to slip in.
- **Come prepared.** This means two things:
 - 1) Come having thoroughly practiced your music. Nothing is more frustrating to conductors than to waste time rehearsing passages that the orchestra members didn't practice ahead of time.
 - 2) Before you head to rehearsal, double check that you have your music, instrument, bow, rosin, reeds, and any [necessary accessories](#). Be sure to note whether or not you need to bring your own stand to rehearsal or you'll be scrambling without one. You might consider keeping a wire stand in your car (like a spare tire) just in case!
- **Bring a pencil.** This one gets its own paragraph. Attending rehearsal without a pencil is like sitting through a university lecture without a taking notes. Even if you think you'll be able to remember every direction the conductor gives, every dynamic change, every cut, and every ritardando, really, you probably won't. Keep a couple pencils in your instrument case so they're always on hand.
- **Don't under- or over-mark the music.** Certainly write down bowings and musical directions as instructed. But don't ruin the sheet music by circling every last key change, accidental, and dynamic marking until your music is black with pencil. And if you're sharing a stand, especially avoid slathering the music with your personal notes and fingerings; it's unprofessional.
- **Be courteous to your colleagues.** Position yourself so both you and your stand partner have enough arm and leg room and can see the music comfortably. Don't be afraid to ask the people around or behind you if they can see the conductor or if you can move a little to give them more space.
- **Don't tune loudly.** Tune as softly as possible so the players around you can hear themselves as well as the tuning A.
- **Don't chat.** If you need to communicate something to your stand partner, do so inconspicuously and quietly. Save personal conversations for break time.
- At the same time, **don't be afraid to ask questions.** Approach your section leader during a break, or raise your hand with [appropriate] questions for the conductor for any clarifications.

- **Don't tap your feet.** The conductor is there to keep you in rhythm, and the tapping creates unnecessary noise.
- **If you're sharing a stand, the inside player** (or player further from the edge of the stage) **turns the pages.**
- **Pass down bowings or comments from the section leader.** Don't be the break in the chain.
- **Players on the outside** (closest to the edge of the stage) **play the top line of a divisi section** while the inside player plays the bottom.
- **Leave your arrogance at home.** Members of the orchestra are all equal; everyone is contributing. Don't gloat if you have a solo, and don't bust out personal solo concertos and performances pieces just to show off. Everyone will be more annoyed than impressed. Also, don't practice another orchestra member's solo to demonstrate that you can play it better.
- If at all possible, **don't miss any rehearsals leading up to a concert.** It is a sign of disrespect to both the conductor and your orchestra members if you're prioritize getting your nails done over working as hard as everyone else in preparation for a performance. Be careful not to double book yourself.
- **If you've agreed to play a performance, don't back out if you get another gig, even if it pays better.** It's bad form, and you may lose your opportunity to ever play with the initial ensemble again if the director deems you flaky.
- **Learn the art of the "hidden yawn."** Sometimes you just can't avoid yawning, but you *can* hide it with a little creativity. Lean over to tie your shoe or pretend to scratch your nose to hide your gaping mouth. Don't let the conductor catch you yawning. Ornery conductors may send you packing or never invite you back.
- **Treat your music with kindness.** Most sheet music is rented or borrowed from a library. Only write markings lightly in pencil so the next player to use it doesn't have to painfully scrub out markings with a massive rubber eraser. Try not to bend pages or tear them. Keep the music in a protective folder to keep it from getting crinkled in transit.
- **Don't wear perfume or cologne.** You'd be surprised by how many people are allergic or irritated by it.
- **TURN OFF YOUR PHONE.** Enough said.
- **Stop when the conductor stops.** If you keep playing, it's a sign that you're not paying attention. Also, don't noodle around or practice while the conductor is talking. Personal practice and group rehearsal are two separate activities.
- **Don't eat during rehearsal.** Bottles of water with lids are okay.
- **Don't question the conductor or treat him/her with disrespect.** Trust in their artistic direction. Don't argue with the conductor or you'll likely find yourself packing up and sent on your way.
- **Don't complain about where you sit.** Even if you've had seating auditions and you think you can play better than other members in your section, graciously accept your position. Just because you sit in the back doesn't mean you're not a valuable player; in fact, being in the group to begin with is a privilege in itself. But don't hesitate to practice your tail off in preparation for the next seating audition.
- **Lastly, enjoy the music!** Don't take rehearsal so seriously that you lose your connection with the piece or with your instrument. Playing music in an ensemble is a real treat; don't forget that you're taking part in a meaningful cultural tradition that will edify your audience.