

Performance & exam day

Everything else in this library is about the work. This sheet is about the twenty minutes the work was for. Playing well when it counts is a separate skill from playing well — and like any skill, it is practised, not hoped for.

COUNTING BACK FROM THE DATE

WHEN	WHAT CHANGES	THE TEST THAT SAYS YOU ARE READY
6 weeks	Notes learnt. Stop learning, start polishing.	You can play each piece through without stopping, slowly.
4 weeks	Play to people — a parent, a sibling, the dog.	You have performed each piece to at least one human being.
2 weeks	Full run-throughs in order, in performance clothes.	You can start any piece from any section on request.
1 week	Reduce practice. Confirm the details, don't rebuild.	Scales, aural and reading are all as fluent as the pieces.
Day before	One gentle run. Pack everything. Sleep.	Your bag is packed and you have not played anything ten times.
On the day	Warm up the body, then the instrument. Nothing new.	You arrive early enough to be bored before you play.

THE BAG, THE NIGHT BEFORE

- ☐ Music — originals, not photocopies, and a named copy for the examiner
- ☐ Spare strings, reeds, valve oil, rosin, cork grease — whatever fails on you
- ☐ Tuner, and a pencil for the examiner's room
- ☐ Water, and something to eat that is not sugar
- ☐ Clothes you have already played in — nothing new, nothing tight at the arms
- ☐ The entry form, the time, and the address of the actual building

WALKING ON

- 1 Walk in slowly. Everything you do will feel twice as fast as it looks.
- 2 Adjust the stool, the stand, the music. Take the time. It is yours.
- 3 Hands ready, then wait. Hear the first bar in your head before you play it.
- 4 Play. When it ends, hold still for a beat before you move.
- 5 Acknowledge the room and walk off at the same speed you came on.

Nerves, practically

The shaking, the dry mouth and the fast heart are your body preparing to work, not warnings. They arrive whether you are ready or not, so stop reading them as a verdict. Slow breathing out — longer out than in — settles the hands within a minute.

When it goes wrong

Keep the pulse and carry on from the next phrase. Never restart, never apologise, never pull a face. Audiences and examiners forget a slip in four bars; they remember a performance that fell apart because a slip was allowed to matter.

Afterwards

Write down three things that went well and one to work on — that day, before the feeling fades. Do not relitigate it for a week. The mark, when it comes, is information about one afternoon, not about you.

PRACTISE PERFORMING

Once a week, play a piece start to finish with no stopping, as if watched. This is the only way to rehearse the thing that actually goes wrong.

KNOW YOUR ENTRY POINTS

Choose four places in each piece you can start from cleanly. If your memory goes, you jump to the next one rather than to the beginning.

WARM UP THE BODY FIRST

Shoulders, arms and breathing before a single note. Cold hands make mistakes that have nothing to do with how well you know the piece.