

INSIDER'S GUIDE:

# AUDITION AND INTERVIEW



**Berklee**  
College of Music

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Every Berklee College of Music student completes a live audition and interview as part of their application. This guide explains each step of the process in detail and offers tips for how to get ready for your big moment.

## Tell Your Story

Through our audition and interview process, we'll learn about who you are as a musician, what you want to do in the future, and how you plan to get there. It's an immersive experience that celebrates your life, your talents, and your aspirations.

This is a space for you to be your 100% authentic self and to share your biggest dreams. We encourage you to really take hold of your identity as an artist by sharing what music means to you, how it led you here, and where it will take you next.

### PRO TIP

The strength of your audition and interview is taken into consideration when we award merit-based scholarships, so we recommend preparing early using the tips you'll find in this document.

### THE WHOLE PICTURE

Berklee's application process includes:

1. **Application form**
2. **Audition and interview**
3. **Transcripts**

Combined, they show us how your creative, academic, and professional experiences have prepared you for a Berklee education.

### SCHEDULING YOUR AUDITION

After you submit your application form, we'll schedule you for an audition and interview based on the preferred locations you selected. Next, you'll receive an email invitation, which you must confirm to reserve your spot.



## What to Expect

Your warm-up time, audition, and interview each take 15 minutes.

**Altogether, the process takes about one hour.** Your family and friends are welcome to join you, though they won't be able to accompany you in the audition and interview room.

### PRO TIP

You have 15 minutes to complete your audition including time for setting up, so it's best to keep your gear to just the essentials.

Even if you plan to pursue a nonperformance major such as music production, therapy, education, or business, you still have to complete a live audition and interview.

In your application, you will choose one principal instrument with which to audition. If you decide to change your instrument before or after auditioning, you'll need to connect with Berklee's Admissions team.







## BOSTON AUDITIONS

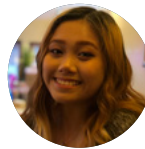
The majority of our in-person auditions are held at our campus in Boston, Massachusetts. It's a full day of immersion into the Berklee community, including information sessions, student-led campus tours, and a live student performance.

## REGIONAL AUDITIONS

We offer **regional auditions** in over 50 cities throughout the world.

You'll find us in venues with rich musical history, such as STAX Music Academy in Memphis, Tennessee; Premises Studios in London, England; and SIAM Yamaha Headquarters in Hamamatsu, Japan.

### What did your family think after coming to your audition?



*"My dad came with me and he was really happy to see how friendly everyone at the audition was!"*

**-Laura Fan, Film Scoring**



*"The student ambassador left a strong impression on my parents, assuring them that I made the best decision when auditioning for Berklee."*

**-Nico Ruggieri, Music Business/Management**

## WHAT TO WEAR

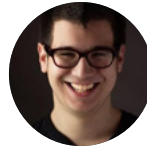
Applicants often ask what to wear to their Berklee College of Music audition. Our answer? Whatever feels like you! We don't have an audition dress code, but we do suggest wearing something that showcases who you are as a musician and artist, so choose something that you're comfortable in that also helps portray your style.

### What did you wear to your audition?



*"I wore a button-down short-sleeved shirt and some khakis. Whenever I perform or play a live gig, I usually go for a button-down, since I like to look clean and represent myself as such."*

**-Kyle Langlois, Performance**



*"I wore a nice sweater and black jeans. Looking back on it now, I think it was a great choice; not too formal, but enough to let those running the audition know that I cared."*

**-Zach Alfred-Levow, Film Scoring and Music Therapy**



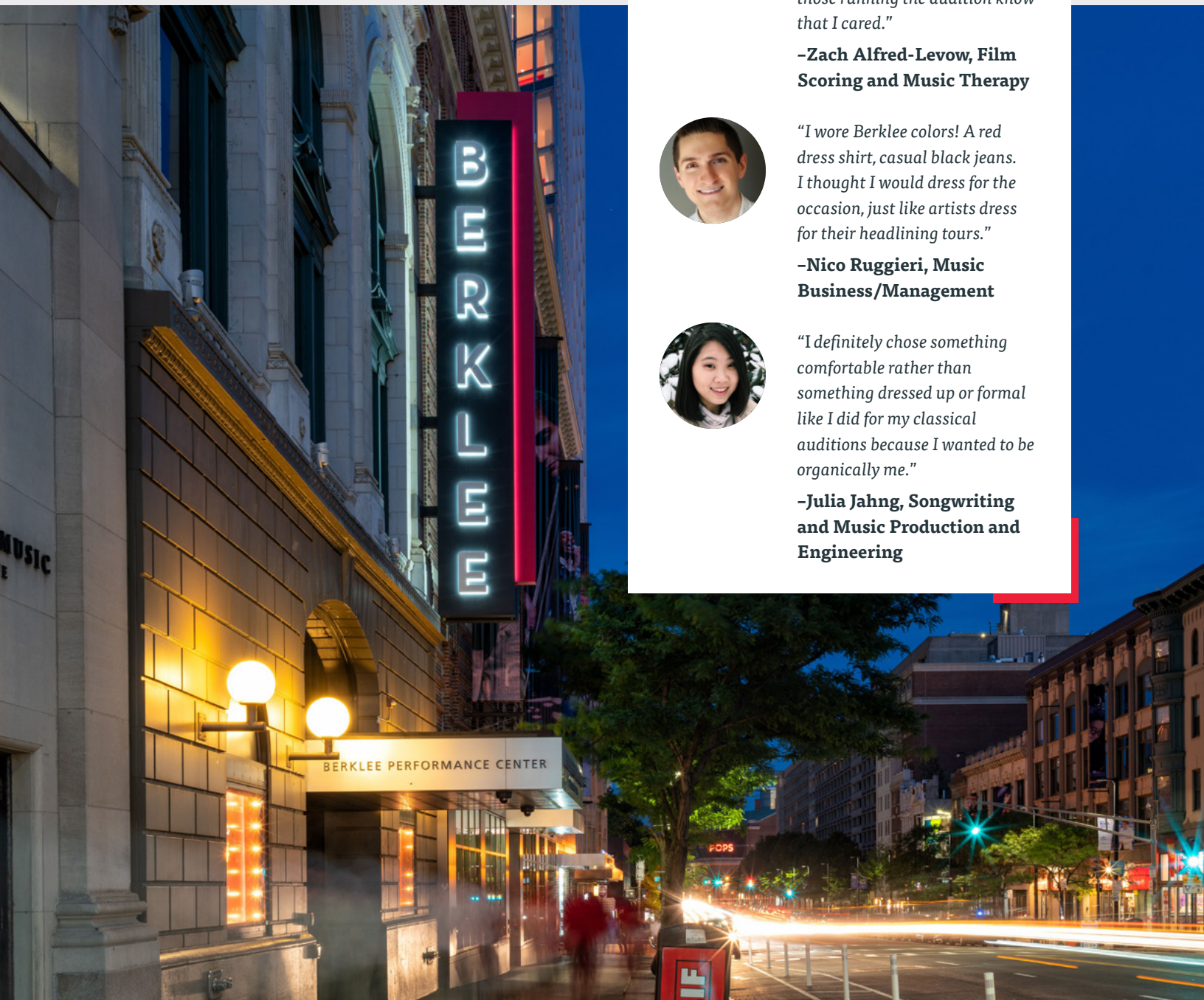
*"I wore Berklee colors! A red dress shirt, casual black jeans. I thought I would dress for the occasion, just like artists dress for their headlining tours."*

**-Nico Ruggieri, Music Business/Management**



*"I definitely chose something comfortable rather than something dressed up or formal like I did for my classical auditions because I wanted to be organically me."*

**-Julia Jahng, Songwriting and Music Production and Engineering**





## Your Audition

At other colleges and conservatories, you might audition for a full panel of faculty from your instrument's department. At Berklee, you'll audition for just a few faculty members who may or may not share the same instrument as you. This means if you're a vocalist, you might have the opportunity to improvise with an amazing saxophonist, or if you're a drummer, you may get to jam with a fantastic bass player. Whatever the mix, you're sure to audition for a select group of experienced faculty members who are excited to hear your music.

Your 15-minute audition comprises four main parts:

**LIVE PREPARED PIECE**

**IMPROVISATION**

**SIGHT READING**

**EAR TRAINING**

Here we'll break down each part so you know what to expect and how to prepare.

### How did you feel after you auditioned?



*"I felt really confident after my audition/interview. Not because I nailed every part, but because I knew I did my best and that I displayed who I really was rather than a version of me that I thought they would want to see."*

**–Julia Jahng, Songwriting and Music Production and Engineering**



*"I wasn't nervous. I was smiling. I felt like I had just put on the first show of a national tour and played an encore. I felt like a star at that moment, and I knew I made the right choice in pursuing music."*

**–Nico Ruggieri, Music Business/Management**





## Live Prepared Piece

Choose one piece in any genre that is three to five minutes long. We know it can be difficult to pick the perfect piece, so we recommend choosing something you're comfortable performing that highlights your current musical abilities. There is no need to choose something extremely challenging that might "impress" the faculty. We just want to hear what you can do well at this point in your musical journey.

You may have heard that Berklee is a "jazz school," and while it's true that we were founded on jazz, our curriculum is distinctly contemporary, and embraces the principal musical movements of our time. That is to say, there is no pressure to play a jazz standard as your prepared piece! We want to hear you perform something that shows us how connected you are to the music, whether that be a Mozart sonata, a Beatles tune, or the newest Top 40 song. Something that might even bring a smile to your face (and ours).

Recent auditioners have performed songs by a diverse array of artists from W.A. Mozart and Hiromi Motomiya to Wes Montgomery and Jaco to Björk and Marta Gómez.



## What did you perform for your audition?



"I auditioned on viola and brought a Chinese instrument, the zhongruan, to show my real passion for Chinese traditional music! Other schools didn't allow me to bring other instruments, so this was a perfect way to showcase the music I do."

**-Laura Fan, Film Scoring**



"My piano teacher picked Liszt's 'Consolation No. 3 in D-Flat Major' for me, and I just felt a deep connection with it right away. I was able to pour my heart and soul into it, so I knew it was the one."

**-Zach Alfred-Levow, Film Scoring and Music Therapy**



"I auditioned with John Mayer's 'Why Georgia.' I wanted to showcase my guitar, since I was auditioning as a guitarist, but I also wanted to show off my voice and singing."

**-Kyle Langlois, Performance**



"I performed a short mashup of Top 40 hits and changed the genre of each song. I thought about what makes me special on my instrument, and it was that I knew many styles."

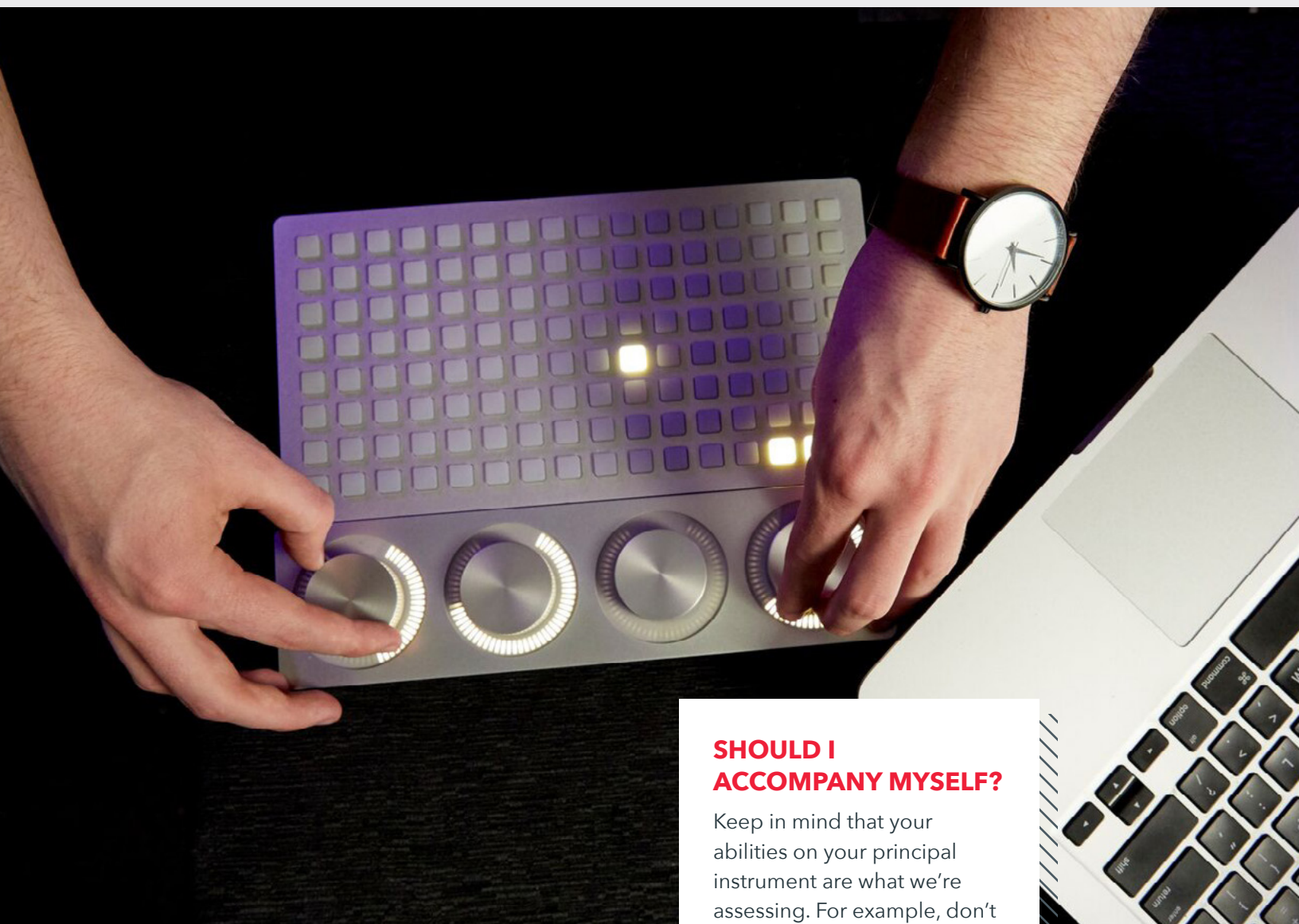
**-Nico Ruggieri, Music Business/Management**



"I sang 'She Used to Be Mine' from the musical Waitress. This song always resonated with me and I had sung it on multiple stages/auditions already, so I was comfortable performing the song in front of others. It also shows my range but doesn't push it too far, which I thought was perfect for an audition."

**-Julia Jahng, Songwriting and Music Production and Engineering**





## DO YOU PLAY AN ELECTRONIC DIGITAL INSTRUMENT?

Berklee celebrates live music-making, so you need to show us your ability to perform, improvise, read, and hear music live. You may not come to the audition and press “play” for a song that you created at an earlier date. This lets us fully see your artistry and get a feel for your technical abilities. Check out our website to [learn more about auditioning on an electronic digital instrument \(EDI\)](#).

## SHOULD I ACCOMPANY MYSELF?

Keep in mind that your abilities on your principal instrument are what we’re assessing. For example, don’t let fancy finger-picking impact your vocal performance if you’re auditioning on voice.

## ARE YOU A SONGWRITER?

If so, you can choose to perform an original piece, but be prepared to perform an additional piece that is a cover. We do want to hear your songwriting style, but it’s equally important for us to know that you can fully learn a piece by another artist.

## Improvisation

You will improvise live on your primary instrument with the faculty conducting the auditions. Improvisation gives us a glimpse into how your musical mind works, and gives you the opportunity to have an exclusive jam session with some of the best musicians in the world.

If you audition in-person, our faculty will play your backing music for you. If you are auditioning online, we will send you digital backing tracks over which you'll improvise. Sometimes, if your internet connection is strong, we will do live comping for you.

### PRO TIP

*"I'm a classical musician and had never done improv before. Just try and keep going! The people conducting the auditions at least would love to see you try your hardest if this isn't something you're familiar with."* **-Laura Fan**

### VOCAL IMPROVISATION

Vocalists may improvise using scat syllables (do, ba, dot, etc.). You do not need to make up lyrics on the spot.





There are various ways to practice improvisation prior to your audition:

### GET INSPIRED

A great place to start is by actively listening to artists who have already mastered the skill of improvisation, such as Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald, or Buddy Rich. Find recordings of them performing live and listen closely to their inflections, musical phrasing, and how they move with the music beneath them.

### GET FAMILIAR

Start with one tune or song you already know and play/sing it over and over again until you start naturally making changes to a few notes or rhythms. Over time, you'll develop more of an ear and feel for how to modify and create new musical patterns in the moment.

### PUT IT TO PRACTICE

Listen to our provided **backing tracks** and practice improvising over them. You can first listen to them a few times, then begin to sing or play what comes naturally to you.

#### What was the improvisation part like?



*"In the drum set audition, they asked me to play a number of styles listed on the website as well as improvising over time. I tried to make every note I played simple and memorable."*

**-Nico Ruggieri, Music Business/Management**



*"I felt that the faculty members were genuinely interested in making a cool little bit of music for 30 seconds, so that really engaged me!"*

**-Zach Alfred-Levow, Film Scoring and Music Therapy**



## Sight Reading

Yes, you'll have to sing or play sheet music for us, but don't worry—it's so we can get an idea of your experience with music (or drum) notation. The examples start on the simpler side and become increasingly more challenging.

### PRO TIP

You will receive your sight reading music examples during your 15-minute warm-up.

If you can't read music or have never taken a theory class, it's okay.

This is just one part of your whole audition, and we take all four sections into consideration. If this isn't your top skill currently, but you excel in the other sections of the audition, you can still achieve a good overall score. Many students come to Berklee with strong skills in other areas and improve their sight reading in the first year through our core curriculum.



**PRO TIP**

*"When you make reading mistakes, the song must go on! Staying in time and following the tempo is more important than a missed note in sight reading."* **-Nico Ruggieri**

**How can I improve my sight reading skills?**

*"Read every day, even if it is a piece or song that you know. Find out where you are with sight reading, and then take it up a level. Push yourself to read harder and harder music, and develop your skills slowly."*

**-Kyle Langlois, Performance**



*"When you have a new tune in front of you, always look at some key elements: style, key, time signature. From there, practice the notes without rhythm and practice just the rhythm without the notes. Whichever is harder for you, do that first! For me, I practice the notes first. In the beginning, practice everything slowly. Even if it's 'written' in the music, they would never ask you to sight read something at 210 bpm!"*

**-Laura Fan, Film Scoring**





## Ear Training

During this part of the audition, you'll listen to melodic and rhythmic phrases then repeat them back on your instrument/voice or by clapping.

### PRACTICE AT HOME

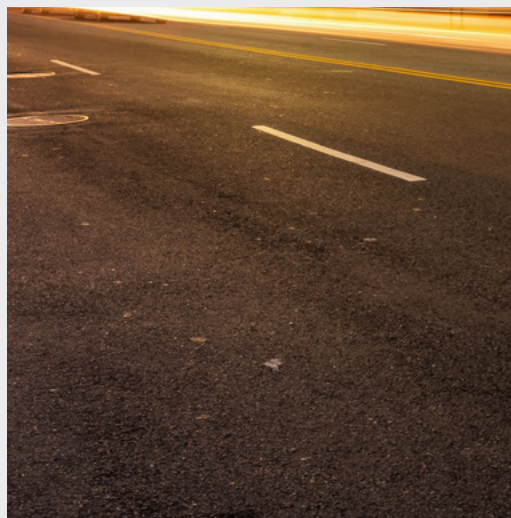
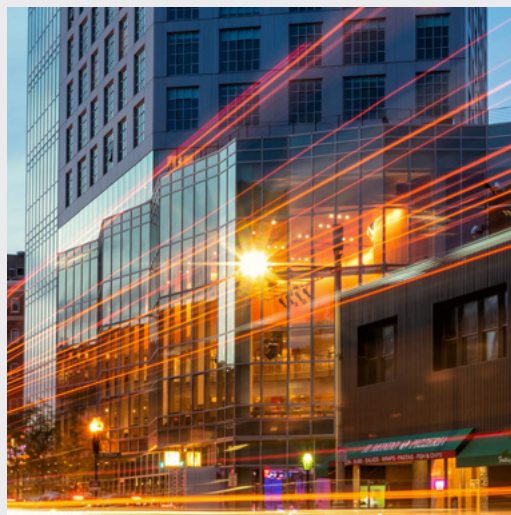
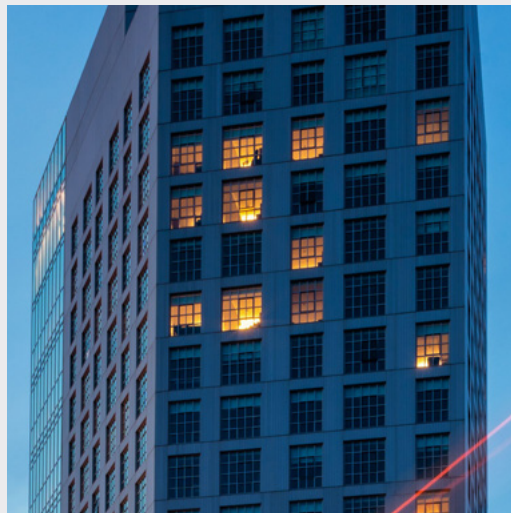
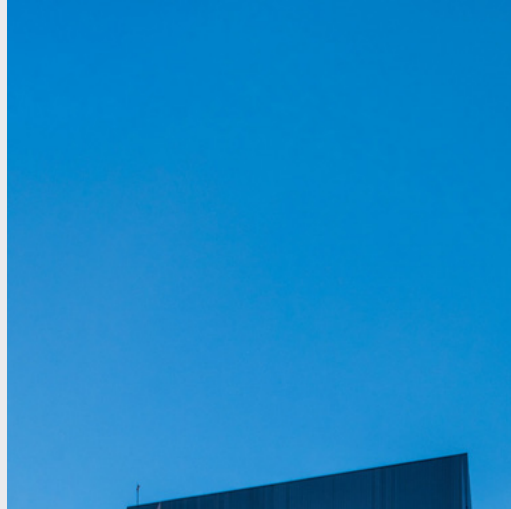
Download an ear training app such as Earpeggio, Teoria, or Tenuto and go through the exercises.

Have a teacher, friend, or family member play a pitch for you from a melodic instrument (such as piano or guitar) and sing the pitch back to them. Over time, add more notes and sing up to six or seven pitches back to them.

Be sure to practice singing/playing back melodies as well as identifying chord qualities (major, minor, augmented, and diminished).

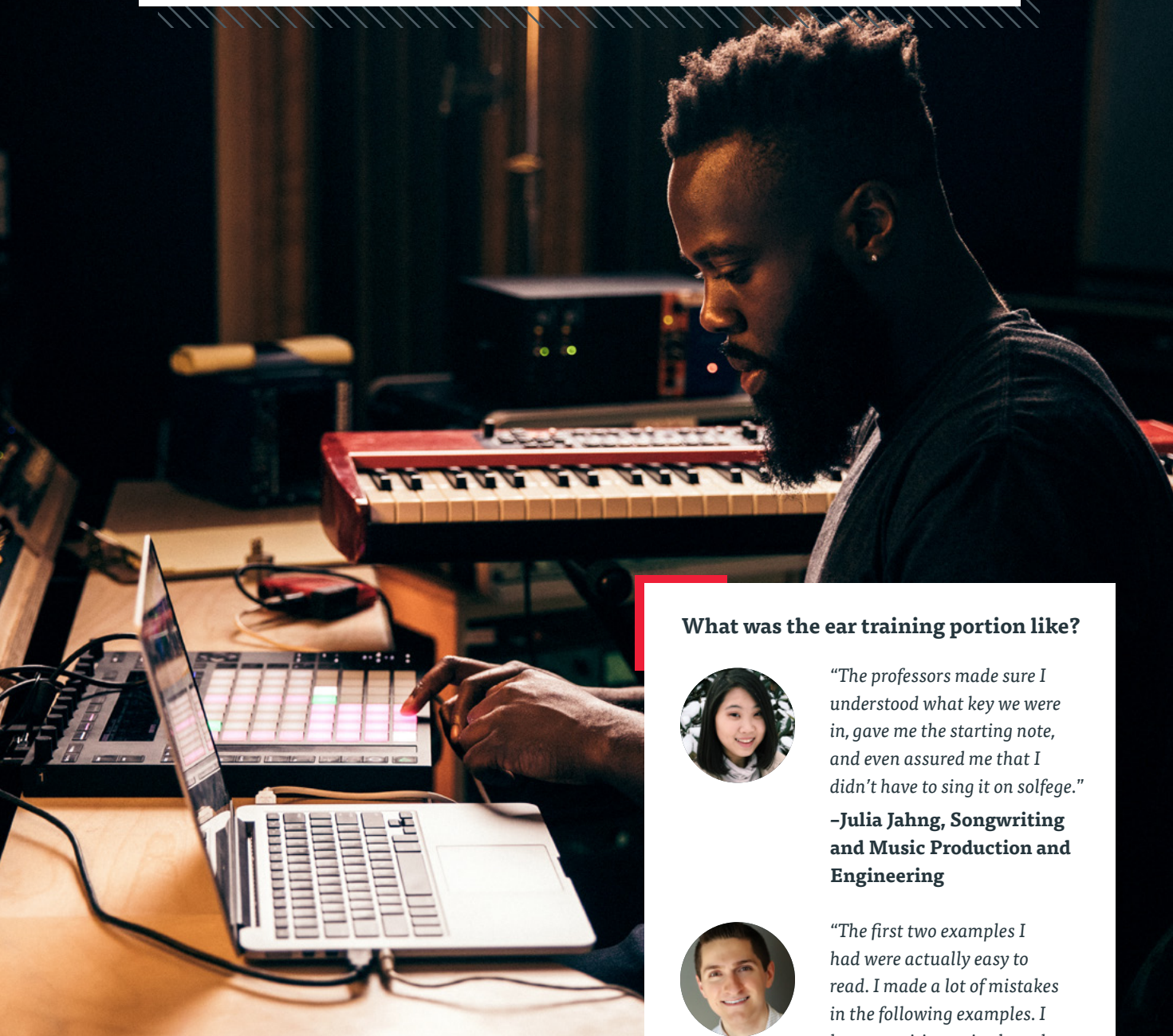
#### PRO TIP

*"If you search 'interval music' in the app store, there are some good apps that help you learn how the different intervals sound if that's something you're not familiar with." -Zach Alfred-Levow*





To build your ear training, reading, and improvisational skills, check out our **free online courses** in music theory, harmony, improvisation, and ear training taught by Berklee faculty.



#### What was the ear training portion like?



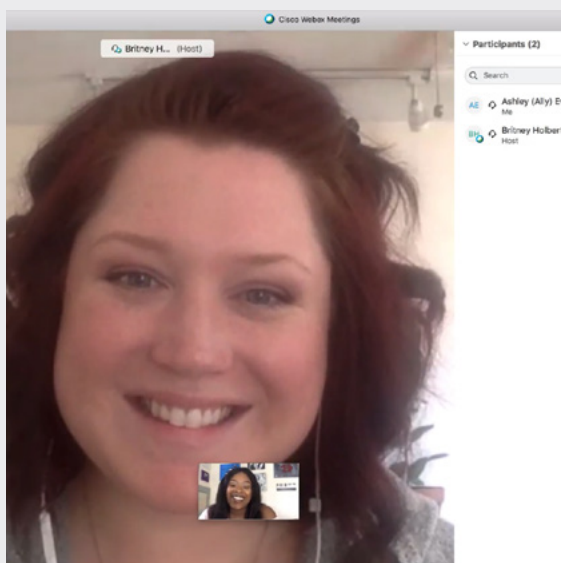
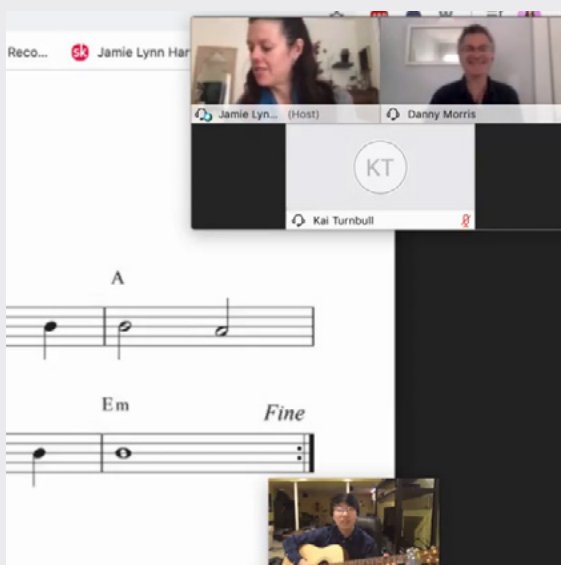
*"The professors made sure I understood what key we were in, gave me the starting note, and even assured me that I didn't have to sing it on solfege."*

**–Julia Jahng, Songwriting and Music Production and Engineering**



*"The first two examples I had were actually easy to read. I made a lot of mistakes in the following examples. I kept a positive attitude and tried my best."*

**–Nico Ruggieri, Music Business/Management**



## Online Auditions

Our online auditions function exactly like our in-person version, except you'll be at home and our faculty and staff will be in Boston. There are **location, technical, and internet speed requirements** that you must meet to be approved for an online audition and interview. If you don't meet them, we will schedule you for your second preferred location or a location nearest to you.

In the online audition, you'll complete the same four components as you would in person.

On your big day, you'll check in to a virtual waiting room where you'll be able to chat with others who are auditioning. When it's your time, you'll receive a link to your online audition and interview rooms where you'll meet Berklee faculty and staff members.

The online waiting room is proctored by a Berklee staff member, so there will be someone available if you have any questions.

All auditions and interviews are the same regardless of where you audition. Your scores will not be lower if you choose to audition somewhere other than Boston.



## Your Interview

During your interview, an Admissions representative will ask you questions that will help us learn about your musical background and creative interests. In about 15 minutes, we'll discuss how you've prepared for Berklee's core music curriculum and what specific goals you have in mind for your future career. It's an opportunity for you to share what you love most about music and why you want to make it a part of your life.

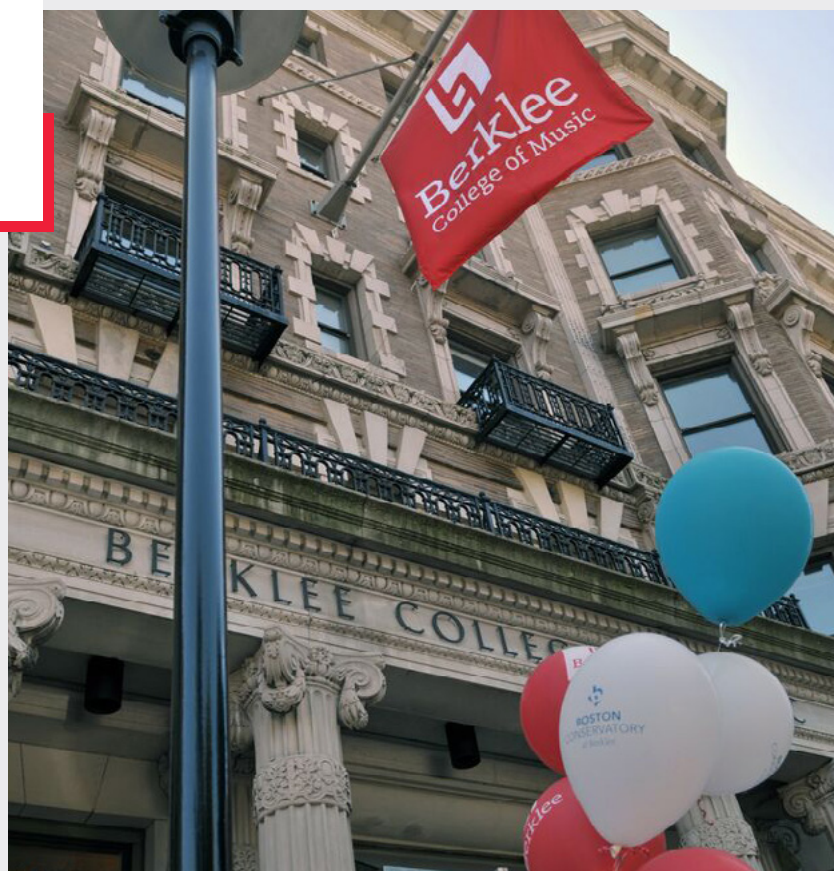
Basically, we want to hear you nerd out about music.

### What was the best part about your interview?



*"The staff makes you feel so comfortable, and they really want to hear about you and your goals."*

**–Julia Jahng, Songwriting and Music Production and Engineering**



**PRO TIP**

*"Eye contact really goes a long way, and please make sure to thank your interviewer (as well as the people in charge of the audition)." -Zach Alfred-Levow*

Here are four sample questions to help you prepare for your interview. We suggest practicing with family or friends so that you feel grounded when you're in the live interview. Just like practicing music, the more you speak your answers aloud, the better they'll come out when it's time to chat with someone from Berklee.

**1. HOW HAVE YOU PREPARED FOR BERKLEE?**

Be prepared to speak about your musical expertise as well as other areas like school clubs, volunteerism, extracurricular interests, etc.

**2. WHAT ARE YOUR PROFESSIONAL/ CAREER GOALS?**

We want to know that you've thought about your future plans, including which major you're interested in and what job you'd like to have after graduation.

**3. WHY DO YOU WANT TO STUDY AT BERKLEE?**

This is where you'll share specific examples about Berklee's community, curriculum, and resources that inspire you to study here.

**4. WHAT WILL YOU CONTRIBUTE TO BERKLEE?**

Tell us something unique about you that others can benefit from, such as leadership or professional experience.





## LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

If English is not your first language, we will assess your language skills during the interview. Our focus is on your ability to understand and answer the questions we ask to ensure that you will be successful completing classes taught in English.

If we feel your language skills would benefit from extra practice, we might require that you complete our **Music and English Intensive Program (MEIP)**.

### What should I know before going into the interview?



*“Really think about what type of musician you are, your goals as a musician, and everything you’ve done related to music so far! Don’t hold back in your interview! Brag about yourself and be proud of who you are.”*

**–Laura Fan, Film Scoring**

## What to Bring

### AUDITION

Generally speaking, you'll need to bring your instrument, cables/adapters, and accompaniment/backing tracks. Check out [this page](#) for your instrument-specific audition day checklist.

If you need to use a phone that has something other than an eighth-inch jack, you must bring your own dongle/adaptor.

### INTERVIEW

Many students find it helpful to bring their résumé as a guide during their interview as it may remind you of all the great things you've achieved (in case you forget in the moment).

If you bring printed materials to your interview, please note that we do not accept them, so you'll need to take them with you when you are finished.

If you'd like to share your resume or samples of your work, you must submit them with **your application**.







## Final Tips



*“BE YOU! Never ever compromise who you are as a musician or person in order to show the judges what you think they want to see. If you want to sing a classical piece, go for it! If you want to sing a rock song, go for it! Just because Berklee is known for jazz/contemporary music does not mean you should adhere to it if it isn’t true to who you are as an artist.”*

**–Julia Jahng, Songwriting and Music Production and Engineering**



*“Berklee is a community that collaborates, not competes. If you want to compete, then you are probably in the wrong place. If you want to bring out your inner musician to its fullest potential, then Berklee is definitely going to be your home!”*

**–Kyle Langlois, Performance**



*“Your audition starts today. It is never too early to start preparing for your audition or interview. The judges will know how much time and energy you place into your audition. Be unique, be yourself, and be proud of what you’re doing.”*

**–Nico Ruggieri, Music Business/Management**

After you finish your audition and interview, the first thing we want you to do is acknowledge the hard work you put in to prepare for this moment. It's a big accomplishment—and that's something that should be celebrated. Next you'll want to make sure your transcripts and supplemental materials are sent to us by the **application deadline**. Then, relish the fact that you just finished your audition and interview for Berklee College of Music. Take a deep breath—you're done!



## CONTACT US

We want to help you do your best. If you have any further questions, reach out to us at **[auditions@berklee.edu](mailto:auditions@berklee.edu)** or **+1 617-747-2579**. We can't wait to see you shine!