

# Preparing for Music School Success

Western Michigan University Professor Keith Hall  
Keith.Hall@wmich.edu

## I. Music Fundamentals

### 1. Highly Proficient on your instrument

- Study privately-Learn fundamentals
- Practice Habit-Many students do not know HOW to practice.
  - Understand what it means to practice effectively.
  - Many students don't practice or study enough.

### 2. Basic Music Theory skills:

- All major and relative minor key signatures
- Pitches (treble and bass clef)
- Other scale systems such as modal, pentatonic, blues
- Triads and seventh chords
- Intervals
- Reading rhythms in simple and compound time with fluency
- Unusual meters
- Sight-reading
- Reading skills outside your normal clef
- Ear training
- Proper notation with pencil and paper
- Finale or Sibelius
- Keyboard skills

\*The more prepared you are for College BEFORE you get there, the more you will get out of it.  
And the more you'll be able to focus on what's important for you.

### 3. Music Literacy

- Variety of styles and cultures
- Be an informed listener and student of music history.
- Know Classic albums and the personnel, composers, producers etc..
  - With the Internet/streaming....There is no album information-do your homework!

### 4. Improvise

- Explore your instrument and its possibilities.
- Transcribe-improves ears, and develops vocabulary

### 5. The Joy of Music Making

- Teachers:
  - Reinforce music making in an ensemble as collaborative behavior.
  - How to be great music makers and friends with other musicians.

## II. Non-Musical Skills

### 1. Earn Good Grades and Test Scores=\$\$\$

### 2. Learn HOW to Learn

- Sometimes it is more about the Process.
- All subjects– develop habits for learning that will result in long term memory, not just short term. Your study and learning habits in these classes will carry over.
- Teachers:
  - Deemphasize standardized testing --not only memorization to pass standardized tests.
  - Teach students HOW to think, not just WHAT to think.

### 3. Practice a Positive Attitude

- Open to all possibilities - try new things and experiment.
- Think Creatively and outside the box.
- Be Self-Motivated.
- Be a Problem Solver.
- Welcome criticism without feeling sorry for yourself or quitting.
- Play for fun as much as possible--helps you remember what inspired you originally.
- Form your own opinions based on knowledge, research and experience-think for yourself.

### 4. Develop Communication Skills

- Be Professional and respectful--Social media has empowered some to be too bold/cocky.
- Verbal Communication - Address and speak to teachers intelligently.
- Written Communication
  - Convey your thoughts and opinions in a clear and concise manner.
  - Emails to teachers and other professionals should not look like a text to a friend!
    - Include a greeting, a clear body, and a sign-off with a thank you.
- Get to know teachers: We want to help.
  - Be assertive but not entitled! Make your feelings and needs clear.
  - Understand that everyone you talk to is busy, especially the best teachers and staff.

### 5. Manage Your Time – Biggest challenge

- Plan ahead.
- Be punctual-5 minutes early is 10 mins late.
- Talk to your parents, teachers and counselors— how do they balance work and play?
- Schedule time to practice and do homework.
- Don't underestimate how long it takes to do things well.
- Do not Overcommit- say NO.
- Work ahead...get started on projects right away.
- Stay Organized-
  - Write things down – Calendar, practice journal, etc.
  - Do not trust your memory.

## GO TO CLASS! - "80 percent of success is just showing up"

### Typical Schedule @ WMU for a freshman

Classes 2-3 times per week-

Theory	Convocation	1 or 2 General
Aural Skills	Area recitals	Education classes
Keyboard	Large Ensemble:	
Music History	Concert/Sym	
Applied lessons	Jazz band, combo	
PLUS....Practice, Homework, Study, extra rehearsals, friends, eating, sleeping, Concerts, Listening to music, socializing, non-musical activities		

#### 6. Stay Healthy

- Take care of yourself--emotional / mental health issues.
- Diet and exercise - Avoid sugar and floss every day.
- Get eight hours of sleep.
- Leave time during the week to do something other than music.

#### 7. Be Professional

- You are a professional musician in training from Day 1. Your approach to every class, rehearsal, and lesson has to be top shelf. Don't wait to get serious about being a music major.
- Be reliable and build a good reputation.

#### 8. Take Responsibility

- Take responsibility for your own outcomes.
- Be proactive – not just a consumer
- Be curious and don't just limit yourself to what is covered in class.
- Always do MORE than what your teachers ask-not just the minimum.
- Keep track of your degree requirements to graduate on time
- Advocate for yourself
- Ask for Help- All colleges and universities have lots of resources-use them.

#### 9. Make Mistakes

- Mistakes are essential. Be fearless. Be relentless. Don't be discouraged.
- When, (not if) you make a mistake--learn from it.
- Remember, you are learning about who you are, your purpose and what fulfills you.

#### 10. Get Out

- Hang out with peers that are like-minded.
  - Relationships can last a lifetime.
  - People hire their friends.
- Help others, nourish strong friendships, and be a cheerleader for others and enjoy their success.
- You're not the only one allowed to know something and/or have an opinion.
- Be present in your music community- get involved.
- Attend concerts, workshops, master classes, especially if they involve students more advanced than you, your teachers or other professionals.
- Travel outside of your city.

## Auditions

### 1. Before

- Apply at multiple schools -- Give yourself options and experience.
- Research School and Prof.
- Connect with college professors before you audition--Take a lesson or two before school starts and/or reach out and ask what the professor would like the student to have prepared for the first lesson.
- Prepare the music thoroughly-these are very competitive.
- Prepare for placement exams-theory, aural skills, keyboard.

### 2. During

- Be professional-you are there to sell yourself.
- Dress for success.
- Be prepared to answer questions about yourself and your goals.
- Talk to current and past students—what is the program’s track record?
- Explore campus and city.
- Ask lots of questions about professor, ensembles, the school and the program, other professional opportunities.

### 3. After

- Send a thank you note follow up—it’s like a job interview.
- Small world - even if you don’t attend, that connection may prove useful in the future.
- Decision Time-
  - The ‘name’ and ‘\$’ aren’t everything; go for the right fit. This decision can determine the direction for your entire life and career.

## Keith Hall

Professor of Jazz-Drum Set – **Western Michigan University**

[www.WMUjazz.com](http://www.WMUjazz.com)

[keith.hall@wmich.edu](mailto:keith.hall@wmich.edu)

Artistic Director — **Keith Hall Summer Drum Intensive**

[www.KeithHallMusic.com](http://www.KeithHallMusic.com)

[Keith@keithhallmusic.com](mailto:Keith@keithhallmusic.com)

Executive Director-**TUNED IN**

[www.wearetunedin@gmail.com](http://www.wearetunedin@gmail.com)

[wearetunedin1@gmail.com](mailto:wearetunedin1@gmail.com)