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## *Tips for making audition tapes*

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As one of my first duties as president of the Montana Choral Directors Association, I was to organize the auditioning of the All-Northwest tapes for this year.

I've recorded many audition tapes and auditioned tapes in the past, but this was my first experience of this magnitude. As the auditioners returned the tapes to me, many had comments about the varying quality of tape submitted, inspiring me to put down some tips for how to make an audition tape which has a chance to be selected.

It was evident that some students had been prepared and taped with much assistance – whether from their choral director or private voice teacher; while others had either been left to their own devices, or had taped with someone not well versed in what is necessary to make a tape which has a chance to be selected.

In these days of shrinking budgets and increasing duties, no one can afford to throw away money or time on audition tapes that don't reflect the student to the best of their abilities.

1. Use clean, unused tapes – stereo equipment of good quality can sometimes hear “layered” sounds if new tapes are not used.
2. Read the instructions, and follow all directions precisely. Don't play along with scales, or help to sing pitches in chromatic vocalizes. Headphones playing pitches for students can sometimes be heard when good listening equipment is used. If a starting pitch is to be played – play only the pitch, not a chord. Check metronome markings with a metronome.
3. Use recording equipment of good quality. When tapes are made on poor equipment the resulting “tape hiss” can almost obscure the student, making it difficult for the auditioner to make an objective judgment about the sound.
4. Find a spot to tape that is “acoustically friendly”. While it may not be advisable to tape from one's shower stall, find a place where the student feel comfortable and sounds their best.
5. Make sure that you send the tapes to the correct person – and that they are postmarked by the deadline.

6. Nothing can surpass having good vocal quality to begin with. Good clear sound, clean diction, open vowels, support, and appropriate vibrato, demonstrate that the student is well trained.
7. Where chromatic exercises are required, using solfege syllables seems to help students stay in tune.
8. When ascending and descending scales are used, more accomplished students generally breathe once at the beginning, then once at the top before descending. This demonstrates a higher level of breath control than students who have to breathe partway through the scales.
9. If the requirement is that the student record a verse of a specific song – make certain that all words are exactly as written – one substitution can disqualify even the best of tapes. In the same vein – if they are to sing a harmony part, make sure that all notes and rhythms are sung exactly as they are written.
10. The student should listen to the tape to be certain that all exercises are recorded in their entirety, and you should be the final listener, even if the student has prepared the tape with a private teacher. When you submit an audition tape of a student in your program, that tape reflects your program – and you need to be sure that it has been appropriately prepared.
11. Finally, no matter how talented, nice, or in need of encouragement a student is – NEVER tell them that they are sure to be selected. There are lots of different ideas about desirable and appropriate sound, and you put your credibility on the line by making a statement about who will be selected.