

Recording Tips for Music Students

Sarah Baugher, August 2020

The Setting:

- Pick a recording space that's quiet and has little background noise. Try to find a space that doesn't have noisy air handling.
- If you're making a video, look for a place with plenty of light.
- When setting up, make sure you know where the microphone is on your device. Make sure you're not covering up the mic when you set the device down. You may need to remove any protective cases or coverings if they're blocking the mic.
- When you place your recording device in the room, be mindful that you're also making a decision about mic placement. You will have to strike a balance between being too close or too far from the mic. If you're too close, the recording may sound overloaded or distorted even with the proper mic input level. If the mic is too far away, you might not hear the details in your playing because they get lost in the sound of the recording space.
- The best placement for a microphone varies from instrument to instrument based on their acoustic properties and method of sound production, but there are some general rules that are helpful for everyone. Try standing about one arm's length away from your recording device, and make sure it's placed at about the same height as your instrument. Make sure your instrument is pointed toward the device and not far off to the side toward another point in the room.
- Whatever setup you settle on, make a note of it so you can easily set it up in the future!

The Recording Program:

- Whichever software you're using, you'll need to do a sound check to make sure the input level on the mic isn't too low or too high. Generally, you want to record at the highest volume you can without overloading the mic, which would cause a distortion in the sound or "clipping."
- Many simple video recording programs will not show you an audio meter to monitor the volume input to your microphone. In this case you will need to make a test recording and listen back to evaluate the sound quality. A good way to do this is to play what you think is the loudest passage in your piece. If on review it sounds crunchy and distorted, lower the input on your mic. You may need to access your device's settings menu to

adjust the mic input. NOTE: some iOS devices (iPhones and iPads) may not let you adjust your mic input level. In this case you will just have to move back from the mic.

- On Zoom, you can use the video record function to make a recording of yourself. In video chat platforms like this, you will need to make sure that you adjust the audio settings to optimize it for musical recording.
 - In Zoom, open the audio settings menu. Click the “Advanced” button to open the advance audio settings menu. Make sure that the box is checked to enable original sound from your microphone. You may also need to disable persistent and intermittent background noise suppression, depending on your version of Zoom. When you return to the main Zoom screen, the button in the upper left hand corner should give you the option to “Turn off original sound,” meaning that original sound is currently on. If you don’t adjust these settings, you may only hear attacks and not the sustain when you play, among other audio processing distortions.
 - In the regular audio settings menu, it is very important to uncheck the “automatically adjust mic volume” option. You must set the mic input level yourself. If you don’t, Zoom will process out your crescendos and decrescendos.
 - Because Zoom will only finish generating a recording once a meeting has been ended, it may be easier to check your sound by bringing in a listening buddy to your meeting rather than making many small test recordings.