

Is a music degree right for me?

1. Practice factor. Can you spend 3-4 hours a day practicing? There is a difference between being busy playing or singing all the time (the typical high school experience) vs. actually focusing and practicing.
2. Music Theory factor: are you serious enough about music to slog through a technically challenging 2 years of theory?
3. Performance degree vs. Music Ed degree vs. academic degree (theory, composition, musicology, etc.)
4. BM vs. BA or BS degrees; "major" vs. "degree"; combined degrees/double majors, etc.
5. What matters: Your grades (yes), college essay (yes!), class rank (yes), number of instruments you play (no!).
6. Playing in college vs. being a music major.

Checking out schools (things to consider)

1. National Association of Schools of Music: www.nasm.arts-accredit.org
2. University education (liberal arts) vs. conservatory education. Depends on your goals.
3. Do research to narrow down your choices: Class sizes, Professors vs. TAs vs. adjunct faculty. "Bridges"
4. Your Private Teacher: Study their resume and bio. Do they perform? How often are they away? Attend a recital of theirs. Take a lesson with them and a masterclass if possible. At the very least, speak with them personally. You will spend four years in lessons and masterclasses with this person—it is important to have a good fit.
5. Some schools have dorms for music majors; find out about music clubs, fraternities, etc. The "feel" of the school will be a big factor for you. "Quality of life" is part of success in college. Sometimes you'll just know the place "feels right" when you visit.
6. Attend summer camp or music clinic on the campus. Get to know the faculty.
7. Visit the campus on a regular class day M-F (not a weekend or special "Day on Campus" only). Talk to music students. Take a campus tour. Hang out in the facilities. Study the list of classes.
8. Make three columns: 1) "Musts" in my school choice, 2) Important but not necessary, and 3) Don't care. Your criteria will be different than others' criteria—e.g. class size, proximity to home, reputation of school, etc.
9. If the school seems a little too eager to have you and makes exciting promises ("You'll be in the top orchestra as a freshman, maybe even concertmaster!") it's probably not a good fit. You need to be a small fish in a big pond; you need to be with musicians who are better than you. That is the only way to get better yourself.

Minimizing the stress of choosing

1. Parents and students: talk about each of your goals. Be honest.
2. Students: do the application work yourself. Make your own phone calls.
3. Visit the school with a friend if possible. It might give you more perspective on your reactions, and make you more willing to ask questions. Ask LOTS of questions.
4. Don't let your school guidance counselor have too much say in your decision. Guidance counselors tend to play it safe and recommend those schools where they're *sure* you'll be accepted. Get a second opinion

The application process

1. 3-5 schools is probably about right; six would be a maximum. Narrowing it down is an important part of the learning process. Timing is important. Be aware of deadlines. Be considerate of others' time, especially those who will be helping you.
2. General application vs. Music School application: different requirements/deadlines.
3. Letters of Recommendation: read directions on application.
4. Resumé: chronological starting with senior year (performances, awards, teachers, teaching experience, church and other performances, news articles).
5. Ask questions. Use email. Establish a relationship with the admissions office & the Music Department administrator. You're going to feel overwhelmed at times—that's normal.
6. Keep track of your materials. The cardboard box or folder filing method, one for each school.

Financial aid and scholarships

1. Don't create your initial list of schools based on cost. THERE IS ALWAYS FINANCIAL AID.
2. Read the fine print if you are offered scholarships or grants. Does the aid change over four years, or is it fixed?

Becoming a thoughtful, informed musician

1. Start to look for connections between your history classes, the literature you're reading, what you're learning about poetry, and your band, choir, orchestra, or piano music. This is how the world works—everything is connected. Thoughtful people see relationships everywhere. Try to situate your music in a historical period and figure out why it sounds the way it does.
2. Listen to lots of recordings, especially of classical music (all genres). Push yourself to listen to unfamiliar music. Try to get a grasp of music history by listening to it. Buy recordings of standard classical works.
3. Attend as many different kinds of concerts as you can. Pay close attention and listen deeply.
4. Collect scores and start building your personal library.
5. Ask yourself this question about every piece you hear: *why does it sound this way? (and not some other way. i.e. why did the composer make these choices, rather than other choices?)*
6. Love learning. Take pleasure in it. Be an Expert Noticer, in that EYSO way.

Music Theory: What can I do now?

1. Sing. Join a choir if you can—any kind of choir. Using your voice is a skill that you will need as a professional musician. Be able to sight sing. Practice reading two lines at once, or reading a full score.
2. Learn piano. It is never too late to start. This is one way to help you visualize scales, intervals, chords, etc. It is also a way you will proof your theory homework assignments.
3. Experiential knowledge is richer, deeper, and longer lasting than cognitive knowledge. Take every opportunity to blend the mental with the aural and the kinesthetic. Play your vocal part, play a note and then sing various intervals above and below it. Play and sing your theory homework.
4. Learn to read various clefs (treble, bass, alto). When you know these, practice reading (singing or playing) two at a time.
5. Learn basic music notation skills: the calligraphy for stems, size of accidentals, beaming, vertical alignment of different parts, spacing, stacking of noteheads or accidentals, placement of dynamic markings, etc.
6. Become proficient at identifying, constructing, hearing and singing intervals. This is a building block skill that cannot be skipped. It is perhaps even more important than knowing key signatures, the circle of fifths, etc. It is the only way to negotiate a score and proceed to analyze it.

(These suggestions were provided by Karen Bottge, Professor of Music Theory at Oberlin Conservatory.)

Music Theory Resources

Theory	Ear Training	Sightreading
www.musictheory.net	www.pitchimprover.com	www.sightreadingfactory.com
www.8notes.com/theory	www.trainer.thetamusic.com	www.practicesightreading.com
www.teoria.com	www.earbeater.com	

Petersons	petersons.com	Search for schools, prepare for tests and learn about financial aid.
FastWeb	fastweb.com	Search for scholarships and colleges.
Princeton Review	princetonreview.com	View school rankings and search for schools via your preferences.
UW Help	uwhelp.wisconsin.edu	Most universities have a site like this to help you explore your options.
Federal Student Aid	studentaid.ed.gov	Learn what your country can do for you.