



Performance anxiety

A practical guide for music teachers

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Introduction

Your performance is a month away. You have a quick flash of panic but then you realise it is one month away and you calm down. One month is not 'right now' and you will be ready by then. You will have practised and everything will be fine.

Your performance is one week away. One week? How did that get here so fast? Where did those three weeks go? Your heart is racing, your mind is questioning your ability, your hands are sweaty, your muscles tighten and you wonder how you will get through your performance. But wait! One week is still not 'right now'. You still have time to practise and you will be alright. You hope!

Your performance is tomorrow! Your heart races faster than ever as you realise that this time tomorrow you will be performing. Have you practised enough? Can you remember the whole piece? What happens if you fail? Why are you doing this? Your breathing is short and shallow. Your heart is hammering against your chest wall and getting louder while your mouth is dry. How can I do this? Why did I do this? I don't want to do this! Don't make me do this! and...**STOP!**

These thoughts, feelings and emotions may be recognisable to anyone who has undertaken a performance in the past. They are common symptoms of performance anxiety or 'stage fright'. A performer's ability to handle these symptoms effectively can significantly influence their future enjoyment of performing and their performance outcomes. This, in turn, can influence how long they continue to pursue the musical activity, particularly in light of such unpleasant emotions. Loss of motivation, burnout and fear of failure can all lead musicians to give up playing music. This is unnecessary, provided the right advice and guidance is given throughout their development and performances.

Performance anxiety usually increases in intensity and frequency as the performance time nears. It impacts a performer's thoughts, feelings, physiology and behaviours. Musicians are frequently left alone to cope with these symptoms and lack sufficient strategies in their own toolkit to deal with it effectively. Additionally, there is insufficient helpful information available to people working or supporting these musicians about how to handle performance anxiety.

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Why this booklet is needed

As Norton's (2016)¹ research demonstrates, demands on music teachers continue to increase as greater emphasis is placed on helping students cope with anxieties from the rest of their lives brought into their music lessons.

This booklet provides music teachers working across all contexts with easy to use, practical strategies to integrate into their students' development over time. The strategies will assist musicians in preparing effectively for upcoming performances – from their first performance to their one hundred and first. Underpinned by a strong research base, this booklet draws on strategies targeting musicians' thoughts, feelings, physiology and behaviours to help them perform optimally. Based on over 140 years of psychological research into performance, teachers can directly help musicians prepare for performance and promote strong self-confidence, leading to students looking forward to upcoming performances rather than fearing them. This desire can result in increased enjoyment of the performance itself.

Anxiety is present in all our lives, but the key to successful performance is to learn how to handle it effectively. To make anxiety our friend and embrace the positive performance outcomes that can result from it is to promote a desire to perform. This mental preparation requires careful and skilful application and practice of the strategies contained within this booklet so that musicians develop the psychological flexibility required to utilise the most appropriate strategy when they need it.

What is performance anxiety/ how does performance anxiety manifest?

Musical Performance Anxiety has been described as 'the experience of intense and persistent anxious apprehension related to musical performance' (Kenny, 2010: 433)². It has affected many famous musicians including John Lennon, Harley Alexander-Sule from Rizzle Kicks, and classical pianist Vladimir Horowitz. Yet, it is not just famous musicians who experience performance anxiety – it is prevalent at all ages and skill levels.

Performance anxiety commonly appears as a cluster of emotions, thoughts and behaviours. Fear, nervousness, worry and dread (cognitive anxiety) frequently combine with negative thoughts about a person's ability and why they are performing. These thoughts and emotions then commonly manifest in physiological and behavioural indicators of anxiety (somatic anxiety), such as:

- rigid posture
- rapid heart rate
- shallow breathing
- fidgeting
- unusual silence
- excessive sweating
- lack of concentration
- unusually talkative
- becoming withdrawn

In the short-term, performance anxiety commonly results in sub-optimal performance and feelings of failure and inadequacy. Over the longer term, continued and untreated performance anxiety can lead to:

- demotivation
- feelings of helplessness
- sullenness
- sadness
- lack of enthusiasm
- complete withdrawal from musical learning and engagement

¹ Norton, N (2016). *Health promotion for musicians: Engaging with the music teacher's perspective*. Conference presentation at 'Musicians' health and wellbeing: An interdisciplinary approach'. London: Royal College of Music.

² Kenny, D T (2010). The role of negative emotions in performance anxiety. In P N Juslin and J Sloboda [Eds], *Handbook of music and emotion: Theory, research, applications*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Introduction

The presence of performance anxiety is not always easy to identify in students. Due to the often uncomfortable nature of anxiety related thoughts and emotions, many students develop methods of coping with the symptoms of performance anxiety on their own, rather than discussing them with others. Some of these coping mechanisms may be effective. However existing coping strategies often have significant limitations. The ability to understand students' existing coping strategies and then to adapt and enhance them, can have significant psychological and emotional benefits for students. The ultimate benefit gained from such development is students' enhanced enjoyment of performing, resulting in a greater willingness to seek out future performance opportunities.

What is 'performance'?

The term 'performance' may lead us to think of large or important public performances. Yet, it also includes examinations, showcases, tests, and, in fact, any kind of sharing of music. We should remember that in a classroom situation or rehearsal of any size, or even an individual instrumental lesson, the fear of potentially having to 'perform' (even informally) can be very stressful for many students. We also need to remember that what we may not view as a 'performance' is something that, in the mind of a student, is an event provoking deep-felt anxiety. Additionally, the situations in which we make, create and perform music vary greatly, and there is a need for teachers to think about developing strategies for ensembles as well as when musicians are performing or learning individually. The strategies offered in this booklet have the scope to be flexibly embedded in order to serve the needs of musicians of all ages, skill levels and musical situations.

It is important to remember that music is an art form. By focussing on the term 'performance' this is perhaps sometimes overlooked and the reasons our students engage in music may be forgotten. Music is a form of creative personal expression with a very important aesthetic dimension that taps into thoughts and feelings. By considering a performance from the perspective of the audience, as well as the performer, we can help our students to consider the wider purpose of performance beyond merely demonstrating skill-based competence.

Providing help and assistance

There is much that teachers can do to avoid putting students in overly stressful situations. Finding ways to support students to feel that their work is valued without putting them under excessive pressure is of paramount importance; building a supportive culture where students feel more confident to take creative risks in a safe environment is crucial. For example, students could video or audio record their work in a practice room and share it in this way, rather than through live performance until they gain confidence. In situations such as 'performing' for a GCSE examination, there is much flexibility about where and when this will take place; it does not have to be on a fixed date and the only 'audience' needs to be the teacher. Familiarising students with a performance space in advance of the performance can also be helpful, as can offering ways for them to undertake simulated performances before, for example, examinations or concerts. Additionally, reducing the 'stakes' of a performance can be extremely effective in helping students rationalise the role of the performance as a small part of their wider development.

However, given the nature of music as a performance art, there are inevitably situations where some kind of performance is necessary and potentially desirable. In order to support students, teachers need to equip them with a range of flexible skills and strategies to help them thrive in potentially stressful situations, and to be able to transfer them between different situations. This requires regular investment of time spent on integrating psychological skill development within their musical development to ensure that strategies are thoroughly embedded and students have the necessary skills to be able to utilise these in a range of transferable situations. The importance of seeing others using and embedding these practical strategies (modelling) should not be underestimated. Modelling is a vital learning mechanism across education, but particularly in performance domains, where physical actions can frequently be more easily understood and normalised by observing the behaviours of others. Teachers should not be afraid to practise these strategies themselves, providing strong role models for their students, and also encourage students and their parents, carers and other family

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members, to try the strategies as a means of reinforcing students' development.

Effective support from others

There are other people in a student's support network who can positively contribute to the development of these psychological skills. In particular, parents, carers and other family members need to understand how best to support students, and are fundamentally important in helping to embed the strategies through creating a positive and supportive climate. Music teachers play an important role in helping others to understand how they can effectively support students.

Signposting

This booklet provides practical strategies for teachers to be able to help their students to deal better with many aspects of performance anxiety. However, whilst these strategies are suitable for a wide range of students, it is down to the professional judgement of a teacher to decide what adaptations may be required, and this comes through a teacher knowing their students well. Teachers have a duty of care to their students; they need to be aware of routes for signposting help from an appropriate specialist when necessary; for example, a student's GP, a chartered psychologist or other medical professional.

How to use this booklet

This booklet has been designed to provide music teachers with a comprehensive guide to the identification and management of performance anxiety over three key time periods. As with the development of any skill, regular practice of the psychological strategies provided will increase their effectiveness.

Part A of the booklet introduces a range of long-term strategies that music teachers can adopt throughout their work to promote healthy emotional and psychological responses to performance, for example through developing their understanding of ways to promote a positive motivational climate. It aims to empower teachers to develop an adaptive and flexible psychological mindset in their students as part of their everyday teaching. Key concepts include the roles of perfectionism, motivation, social comparison, fear of failure and deliberate practice.

Part B of the booklet moves the focus to the week leading up to a performance – a time of potentially increased anxiety. Anxiety, and musicians' reactions to it, commonly intensifies as the performance time nears. Music teachers are provided with a series of flexible strategies and techniques they can use with their students. Each strategy acts on different manifestations of anxiety and an easy to follow flow chart assists teachers in identifying an appropriate psychological coping strategy for students to use. Key strategies include imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, cognitive reframing, brief centering exercises and emotional acceptance strategies.

Part C of the booklet recommends effective coping strategies and techniques that teachers and parents can develop in musicians in the build up to, throughout and after the performance. It identifies common response patterns to performance anxiety occurring throughout this emotionally charged time period. Strategies focusing on sleep, nutrition, pre-performance routines, breathing techniques, body posture, performance checklists, concentration whilst performing and effective evaluation, are all provided to help students manage their performance anxiety. The aim of these strategies is to help students develop strong self-confidence and emotional resilience.

Part A – Long-term considerations

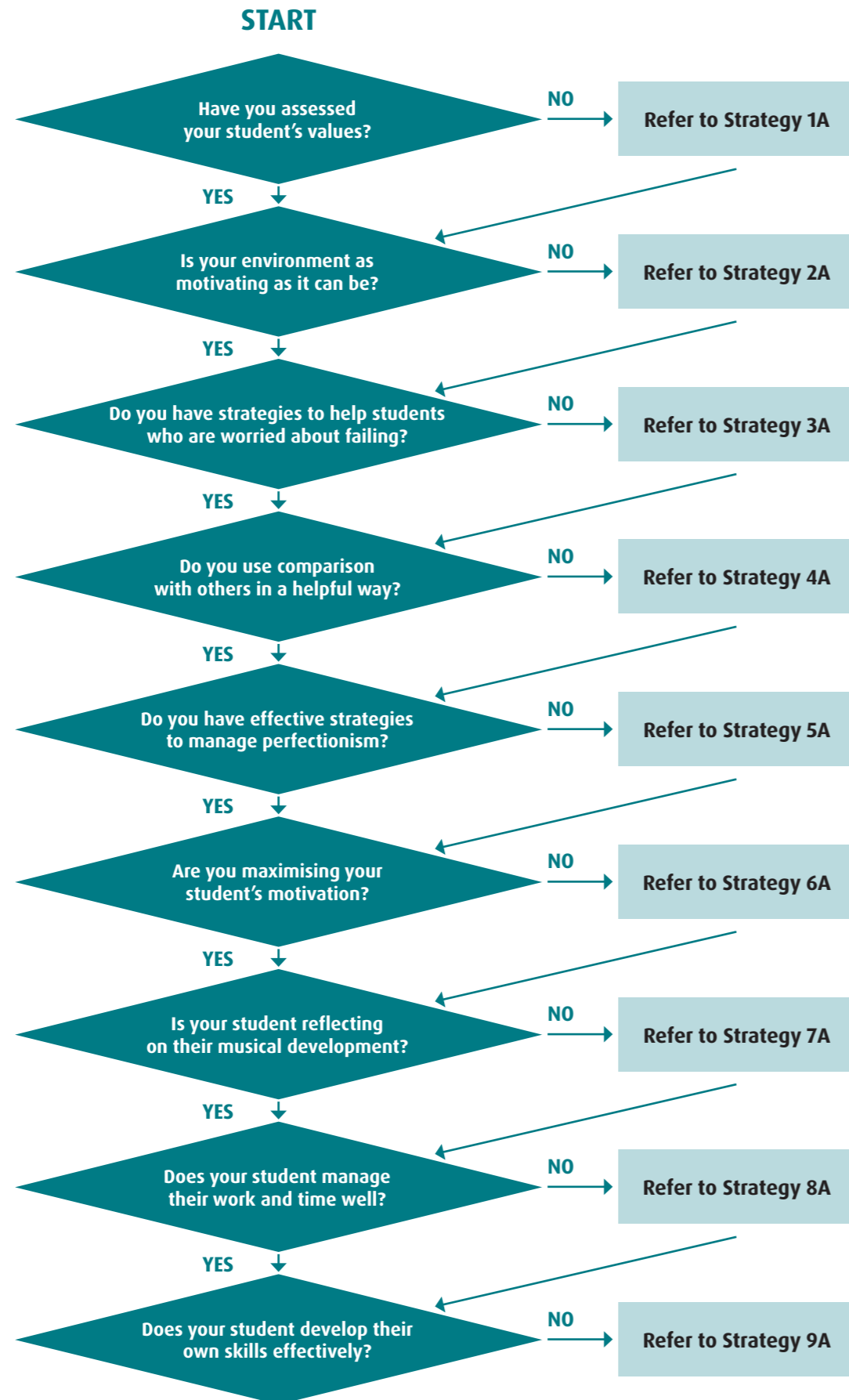
Part A – Long-term considerations

Part A of the booklet aims to promote the long-term psychological development of students through teachers' planning over the longer term. Suggestions are made to help teachers promote the notion that performance is just a small part of students' long term development. Between the approximate ages of 6 and 12 years old, Erikson (1963)³ suggests that students are psychologically developing to feel competent rather than inferior. Between the approximate ages of 13 and 19 years, he suggests that students are trying to find their identity in a bid to overcome the confusion that is present throughout this stage of development. Knowing these strivings enables teachers to identify ways they can influence students' development through their teachings, so that they promote robust psychological, as well as musical, development.

Flowchart A provides a series of questions for teachers to answer in order to arrive at a suitable potential strategy to be used with a specific student at a given point in time. Embedding many of the strategies in Part A of the booklet over time will help promote healthy psychological development.

3 Erikson, E H (1963). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.

Flowchart A – Long-term considerations



Area 1A

Values – Identifying what music means to the student

(Adapted from Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012)⁴

In order to avoid burnout and to help preserve motivation it is necessary to develop an understanding of what your student values when learning music. Musicians are not all the same and understanding what makes each student tick is an appropriate and central tenet of all development. Understanding what each student values in their music should be regularly reviewed with your students

because as students develop, their values are likely to change. This is important because as values change, the behaviour chosen following those values also changes. Understanding values helps your students to carry on with musical learning when other activities – socialising, sport and watching TV for example – may seem more appealing.

Strategy 1A
Identifying values

When identifying each of your student's values, think about answering the following questions:

1. What is important for you when learning music?
2. Why do you want to learn music/ this instrument?
3. What is fun about playing and learning music?
4. What music do you like to listen to? What is it about this music that appeals to you?
5. Is there anything stopping you from behaving in a way that is in line with your values?
6. What can be done to overcome any identified barriers?

⁴ Hayes, S C, Strosahl, K D, & Wilson, K G (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change*. 2nd Ed New York: The Guildford Press.

Part A – Long-term considerations

Area 2A

Motivational climate – Promoting healthy psychological development through your teaching and assessment

(Adapted from Duda & Balaguer, 2007)⁵

The environment surrounding a student can often influence their development and their motivation to study and practise. A climate that is stifling and emphasises solely comparison with others above development can lead to feelings of stress and pressure. This is magnified when the student's progress is only monitored

by reference to others and by amount of exams they have passed. Over time this is likely to lead to low motivation and burnout. It is therefore important to create an environment based on self-progression, enjoyment and skill development.

Strategy 2A

Considerations for your teaching and assessment environment

When setting up your teaching and assessment environment to what extent have you considered the following? Can any further changes be made in response to the questions below?

1. How do I, as a teacher, view progression? Is it a holistic view that goes beyond my student's 'skill development'?
2. How does my student view progression? What about their parents / carers – how do they view progression?
3. How have I assessed my students' abilities at the present moment?
4. How will I know if my student is developing?
5. What progression routes am I signposting for my student and guiding them towards? Are these suitable? Do they take into account my student's own ideas and aspirations?
6. How will I know if my student is enjoying themselves?
7. What are my student's values?
8. Am I recording my student's progress against their self or others?
9. Do my students get the chance to try lots of musical styles, genres and techniques?
10. Are my students aware of how they can progress and the progression they have already made?
11. What are the key skills and competencies I want to encourage my student to develop as they progress?
12. Am I integrating my student's values into my planning, teaching and assessment?

⁵ Duda, J L & Balaguer, I (2007) Coach-created motivational climate. In S Jowett & D Lavallee [Eds], *Social psychology in sport*. Champaign, USA: Human Kinetics.

Part A – Long-term considerations

Area 3A

Fear of failure – Helping students to overcome worries about not performing well

(Adapted from Conroy, Willow & Metzler, 2002)⁶

A fear of failure can lead students to experience anxiety in performance situations. Essentially, fear of failing is caused through a desire not to let other people down, a desire not to feel shame

and embarrassment, a fear that significant others will lose interest and a mechanism not to devalue one's self-esteem.

Strategy 3A

View failure as part of the normal process of developing skill

When teaching and assessing, it is important to:

1. Constantly confirm to students that all performers fail at times (normalising). Failing is a natural and central part of the learning process.
2. Provide examples from your own history where you and others have failed but became better because of it.
3. Emphasise that what you learn from failure is vital.
4. Emphasise that you only want them to do well and that you measure success by their effort as well as their achievements. Monitor and emphasise the central role of effort constantly with your students.
5. Regularly provide performance opportunities and demonstrate to your students how to learn from failure.
6. Set goals based on each student's individual development and review these goals regularly.
7. Encourage parents to reward improvement, effort and development, rather than just achievement. Encourage parents to respond to setbacks in a positive way and to emphasise the things that went well.

⁶ Conroy, D E, Willow, J P & Metzler, J N (2002). Multi-dimensional fear of failure measurement: The performance failure appraisal inventory. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 14, 79-90.

Part A – Long-term considerations

Area 4A

Social comparison – Taking a wider view of the influences of friends

All students develop at different rates, different ages and at different times. Physical and cognitive developmental growth spurts can have a serious impact on students as they develop. Such development can impact students' spatial awareness, confuse them in relation to their former ability and lead to problems with social

comparisons. Social comparisons are inevitable and can help to promote healthy competition and trying. However, if left untouched, inappropriate comparison can make your students feel inferior, which can result in de-motivation and feelings of worthlessness / inferiority.

Strategy 4A

Develop strong role models for social comparison

When students compare themselves with others, use the following:

1. If a student uses a lot of social comparison then focus their attention on what those other people do well. Ask your student, what behaviour does that person demonstrate that you can follow?
2. Find out and emphasise what your student does better than other people they are comparing themselves with. This needs to go beyond your student's 'achievement' and consider your student's behaviours.
3. Reinforce the development your student has already made to date against themselves.
4. Bring your student's attention back to their own development – what do you need to do next to get better?
5. Review the goals you have set with your student – emphasise goals that are based on development and effort rather than an outcome (e.g. a particular grade of music). Use the person your student compares themselves with to help update, or set, new goals.
6. Review your student's values with them. How is their behaviour matching those values?

Part A – Long-term considerations

Area 5A

Perfectionism – Too much focus on a perfect performance?

Students often feel that their performance has to be perfect to be of any value. This is not the case. Helping your student understand this is important. High expectations and concern over other people's opinions about them and their performance can lead to feelings of extreme pressure and stress. It can also impact on students' self-worth and this can lead to depression and unhelpful coping strategies if unrealistic goals are not met. Knowing your students well can help you to contextualise perfectionism in relation to each student's life.

There is a difference between perfectionistic *strivings* and perfectionistic *concerns*. 'Strivings' are normal levels of perfectionism including setting high standards, enjoying

working towards achieving those standards and accepting that not all performances can be perfect. These are generally associated with positive outcomes – such as a desire to work hard, to develop quickly, to achieve high goals and to give maximum effort to do so while separating out self-esteem from their performance. People with perfectionistic 'concerns', on the other hand, set unrealistic and unattainable goals, become disheartened by their efforts and are unwilling to relax their standards. These concerns frequently lead to unhelpful outcomes such as depression, low self-worth and anxiety. High perfectionistic strivings themselves are ok but high perfectionistic concerns can cause significant long-term problems.

Strategy 5A

Set high, but flexible, standards for development

When you are reviewing your teaching and assessment practice, consider the following questions:

1. Are you aware of what expectations of others your student perceives? This could include expectations of parents and peers.
2. Do these expectations need modifying? Are they too high?
3. How does your student explain their performance? Use the 'self-regulation for performance' sheet in this section of the booklet to evaluate your student's performance objectively.
4. Seek to change perfectionistic concerns into strivings by setting appropriately challenging goals with your students and keeping these goals flexible.
5. Emphasise to your student that their performance was only on that occasion and does not reflect on them in general. Encourage your students to view themselves as a musician for part of their self. It is easy for students to generalise failure in one specific domain to wider areas – e.g. 'I failed my music recital' can easily become 'I am a failure as a person'.
6. Regularly review mistakes and emphasise the learning from them – over time, this should lessen the perfectionistic concerns and reduce the rigidity with which your student holds their standards.

Part A – Long-term considerations

Area 6A

Motivation – What encourages your students to perform?

In line with the way you establish your teaching and assessment space, students will also be influenced in their motivation by their parents, peers and their personality. Students are motivated by achieving something – for example, playing a new song, a new grade, a new instrument etc. However, sole emphasis on achievements can lead to negative emotional and well-being consequences. A student’s wider environment and culture frequently provides inescapable external rewards for achievement (e.g. a grade certificate, parental praise, money etc.). Aiming for

these external rewards is not a problem in itself. However, it is essential that students are encouraged to focus on their own development made through these achievements, with the rewards themselves viewed as a means to an end. It is vital to set appropriate goals to encourage your student to play music for the love of developing themselves and for music’s own sake. Goal-setting is a key way to help students focus their attention on how they are developing and gain internal rewards (feeling happy that they are developing, feeling motivated to develop etc.).

Strategy 6A

Goal-setting template for development through internal and external rewards

Complete a goal-setting sheet on a regular basis to ensure you are keeping the attention focussed on development rather than outcome. Goals should be set using the acronym ‘SMART’, meaning Specific, Measurable, Action-based, Realistic and Timed. These goals will become more motivating if your student is involved in setting the goal. So, for example, the goal of ‘I want to improve’ could be reset as ‘I want to develop my piano playing so that I can play the full set of scales by this time next month’.

The acronym ‘SMART’, provides a helpful way to set appropriate and motivating goals with your students. SMART goals are:

Specific – the more specific the goal, the more effective it is likely to be.

Measurable – goals should be able to be measured to know whether they have been met.

Action-based – goals involving actions are more motivational and are easily visible.

Realistic – setting goals that exceed realistic expectations can be demotivating.

Timed – select a reasonable timescale by which goal achievement will be met.

Goals should include the three main identified types. This table summarises the type of goals you should consider including.

Goal Type	Description	Example
Outcome	These are final achievements of recognition usually by some external person or body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing a specific grade in music by a selected date
Process	These are achieved through emphasising development of skills needed to attain greater skill development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violinist to use more of the bow • Guitarist to change between chords more fluently • Pianist to develop rubato • Singer to develop vibrato
Performance	These are achieved with reference to the student’s previous performance level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pianist will be able to play the final section of the music more fluently than they could two weeks earlier

Part A – Long-term considerations

Area 7A

Reflective journal writing – Students thinking about their own progress and future development

The purpose of a journal is to encourage students to discuss, write down or audio-record their thoughts, feelings and emotions about their progress on a regular basis. To focus your student’s attention, it is often helpful to record the goal(s) they were trying to achieve when reflecting on a practice or

performance session. Reflective journal writing is a useful way of encouraging psychological development through the processes of awareness and reflection.

Many students may already keep a practice diary that can be adapted for this purpose.

Strategy 7A

Encourage your student to keep a reflective journal

The manner in which your students keep a journal (written in a diary, on their phone, audio recorded) will vary from student to student. Two versions of prompt questions are offered – teachers should make a judgement about which version is most suitable for each student. The journal can be completed by students on their own, with you or with their parents. Students should be encouraged to reflect on the following key points:

For older students:

1. Which goal(s) have I worked on today?
2. What did I do well today?
3. What else could I have done to move me toward my goal?
4. What are my thoughts and feelings about today?

For younger students:

1. What did I do today?
2. What was great and fun about what I did today?
3. What did I think about today?

Part A – Long-term considerations

Area 8A
Time management and organisation skills for students and parents

Students can often find it difficult to plan for the necessary amount of practice they need to improve. It is also important not to over-train as this runs a risk that the student will become disinterested in their musical development. Helping students to build a

regular practice regime is a key component to not only effective practice, but continued enjoyment. Practice is also necessary to develop as a musician (e.g. McPherson, Davidson & Faulkner, 2012)⁷.

Strategy 8A
Practice planner

Students should consider the times they expect to be available to practise each day and colour in the sections of the relevant day to denote these times in advance. The length of practice time chosen should be reasonable and not over-burden the student either physically or psychologically. Whilst the time slots are split into one-hour slots on the example given below, you may wish to adjust them for younger and less experienced students, for example by drawing 20 to 30 minute time slots for them to choose from.

Day	10-11	11-12	lunch	2-3	3-4	4-5	dinner	7-8	8-9
Monday									
Tuesday									
Wednesday									
Thursday									
Friday									
Saturday									
Sunday									

⁷ McPherson, G E Davidson, J W & Faulkner, R (2012) *Music in our lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Part A – Long-term considerations

Area 9A
Self-regulation skills – Encouraging students to be more active in developing their skills

Musical development can be improved through the development of greater self-regulation skills. These skills require students to compare their present performance levels with a level they know they want to achieve. By working out what

is missing from their current performance to get them to the next level and knowing how to improve those specific points, students can practise more deliberately and develop skills faster, whether individually or in group learning / rehearsal situations.

Strategy 9A
Deliberate practice forms

Here is a form (overleaf) your students can complete before they practise and then again after they have practised. The aim of the form is to get the student to focus on areas they specifically want to practise, rather than practising with no clear aim. Such forms can also be adapted for working with groups in ensemble situations and for younger students. These forms could be incorporated into a student’s regular notes or practice book.

MUSIC PRACTICE REFLECTION FORM

Name: _____

Date: _____

PRE-PRACTICE:

1) What do you want to improve in your practice today?

What one single aspect (for example, of your technique) is going to help you to achieve this today?

2) How will you know if you have improved this by the end of the practice session?

POST-PRACTICE REFLECTION:

3) How much did you improve what you wanted to improve today?

Not at all A little Quite a lot Totally improved

4) How do you know that you improved what you wanted to?

5) Identify one thing you will try to improve next time (Keep it positive!)

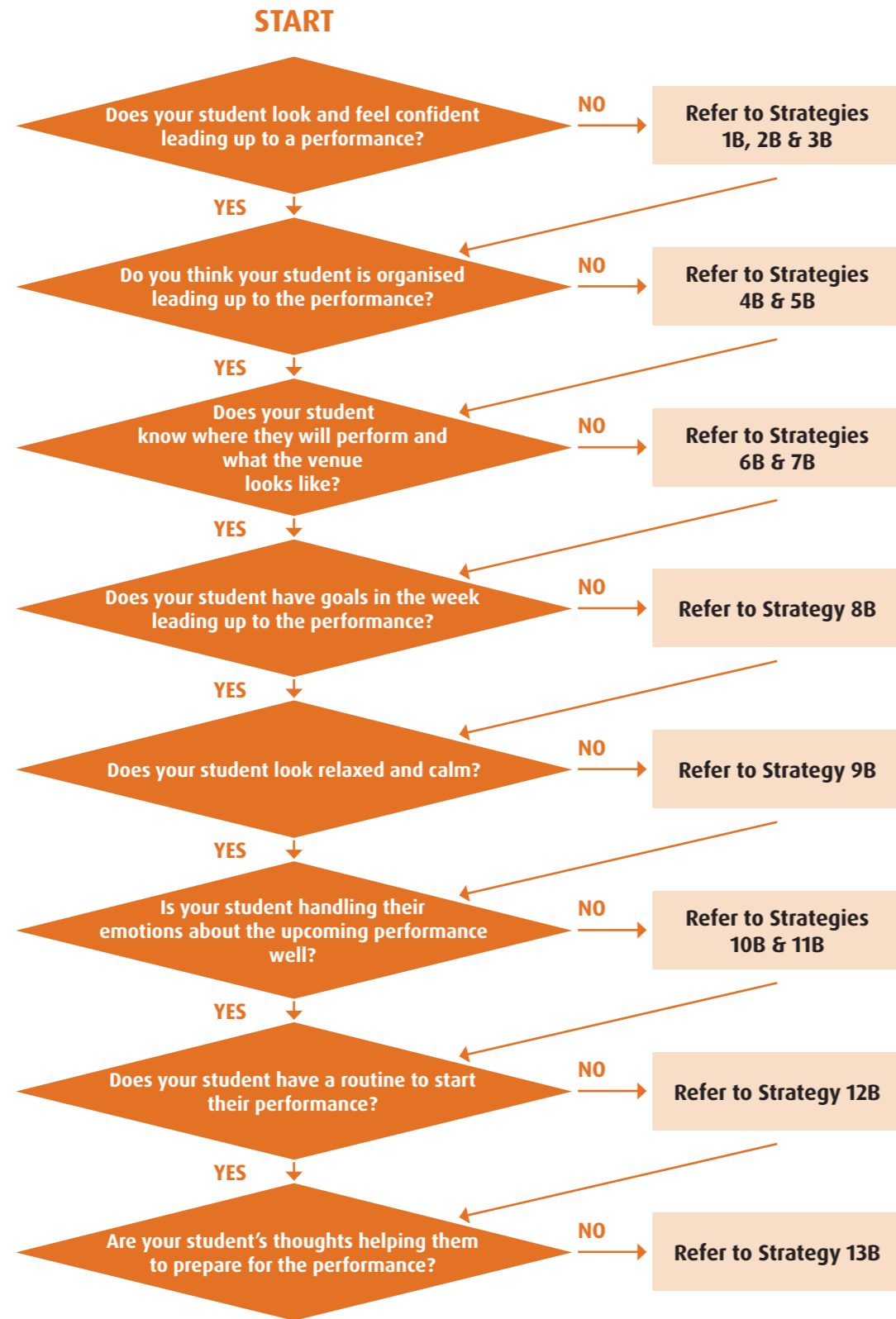
Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

PART B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

The aim of section B of the booklet is to help teachers to psychologically prepare their music students for upcoming performances in the week leading up to a performance. This is a critical time for performers as both the intensity and frequency of anxiety symptoms will increase during this time period. This part of the booklet builds on the suggestions made in Part A and provides a key set of strategies that teachers can use with their students. The overarching aim of the strategies is to develop and build self-belief and self-confidence that the performance will go well. This will be achieved through developing key psychological skills to help students focus their attention on areas that will help them to perform well combined with effective coping strategies.

Flowchart B provides a series of questions for teachers to answer in order to arrive at a suitable potential strategy to be used with a specific student during this time period. However, as with the strategies outlined in Part A, embedding many of the strategies over time will help promote healthy psychological development.

Flowchart B – 7 days to 1 day prior to planned performance



Area 1B
Build confidence (1) – Identify key sections of the performance piece(s) and practise weaker sections

Knowing that there is a section of a performance that a performer is not confident about can lead to anxiety both before and during a performance.

By identifying weaker areas prior to the performance time and practising these, self-confidence can be developed.

Strategy 1B
Key section(s) practice sheet

This sheet should be used up to the final practice lesson the teacher has with their student before a planned performance. It forms the basis of the final evaluation of key errors that the student needs to be comfortable they have rectified prior to the performance day.

Work or exercise to be played:

Specific section(s) of the work, or technical exercises (e.g. scales) that need to be developed:

Key point that needs to be improved in this section (e.g. linked to fluency, technique, interpretation etc.):

Technical information which is important to remember for this section:

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 2B
Build confidence (2) – Identify key strengths in the upcoming performance

Performers who experience anxiety can very easily focus their attention on the parts of the performance they have the most trouble with. This can lead to a focus on parts of the performance they perceive they can't do, which in turn will deflate self-confidence and self-belief.

Strategy 2B
Key strengths sheet

This exercise is designed to encourage students to reflect on the strengths of their practice performances on the musical pieces to date. Remembering the strengths of musical practice helps to build confidence and self-belief in students that they can achieve.

Work to be played:

Parts that I play really well in this work:

Why do I think this?

Parts that I really enjoy playing and feel confident about in this work:

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 3B
Build confidence (3) – Think about past successes

When seeking to help students prepare for an upcoming performance, it is helpful for students to remember previous successes they have had. This reminder sheet provides teachers with an easy to use framework they can ask students to complete in the week leading up to a performance. Prior experience of success is a performer's greatest source of self-confidence about future success, so by reminding students of their past successes, they will develop greater confidence. Students' reflection on past successes will also help them remember effective anxiety coping strategies they used in previous performances.

Strategy 3B
Recognising and recording previous achievements

Personal musical achievements

Work with your student to fill in the table with as many positive thoughts about their personal musical achievements as possible.

For example:

- I passed Grade 3 last month
- I play as part of an orchestra
- I enjoy playing music
- I enjoy working out how to play a new piece
- I practise very hard
- My music entertains others and my friends and family say they like it
- I enjoy performing and won a prize for doing so last year

Complete the following steps:

1. Create your list in the table provided. Ensure your comments have personal meaning for you.
2. Repeat the achievements to yourself on a very regular basis – at least once per day.
3. When you feel comfortable repeating them, try using them in practice and during competitions.
4. Regularly review and update your list of achievements.
5. Keep repeating your achievements even if you feel confident. You never know what challenges await.

Personal musical achievements
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Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 4B

Encourage your students to organise their time in the week leading up to the performance

By providing students with a practice sheet they can complete for the week leading up to the performance, students can organise their time. You may wish to involve parents where you feel this may be beneficial, but also being mindful that this may be a source

of anxiety for some students. Following this strategy, your student can prepare fully for the performance day and feel confident knowing they have practised as much as necessary.

Strategy 4B

Practice timetable

Students should consider the times they plan to practise each day and colour in the sections of the relevant day to denote these times. They should then try to adhere to the identified timetable as closely as possible. As suggested previously, these charts could be adapted for less experienced students by shortening the time periods to 20-30 minutes per session.

Day	10-11	11-12	lunch	2-3	3-4	4-5	dinner	7-8	8-9
6 days to performance									
5 days to performance									
4 days to performance									
3 days to performance									
2 days to performance									
1 day to performance									
Performance Day	One Run Through								

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 5B

Checklist sheet for the day of the performance

On the day of the performance it is not unusual for emotions to be running high. Anxiety is likely to be one of those emotions and, if left unchecked, can result in a narrow focus of attention. This can mean that students may easily overlook something that may appear obvious at any other time. Asking students to compile a checklist ready for completion on the morning of their performance is a helpful way of reducing stress about forgetting things they will

need in the performance. The checklist will provide the student with confidence that they have everything they need before setting off for the performance. This list will vary slightly depending on the instrument your student plays. For some students, involving their parent in the design and checking of this list may be helpful.

Strategy 5B

Day of performance checklist reminder

An example of a checklist is detailed below. This should be modified in the week leading up to the performance so that the student already imagines themselves in the performance environment and being familiar with it.

Example day of performance checklist

This checklist is a last reminder of all the items you will need to take with you for your upcoming performance. Complete the checklist before you set off.

Please make sure you have the following items:

1. Your musical instrument including all the necessary sections and accessories. (Please check your instrument is in good working order – e.g. strings, valves, slides, reeds etc.
2. Relevant items to keep your instrument/voice in tune and warmed up
3. Any printed music, audio recordings and lead sheets
4. A bottle of water
5. Food you may need
6. Details of your performance location
7. Your performance confirmation sheet
8. Personal identification
9. Performance clothing

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 6B

Familiarity with the performance arena before the performance

A lot of performance anxiety relates to the unknown. The mind feels comfortable doing familiar activities in familiar surroundings and the mere suggestion of a performance in an environment with which the student is unfamiliar can be daunting and anxiety inducing. It is helpful

to try to make the practice area as similar as possible to the upcoming performance area. However, it is acknowledged that this is not always possible. Providing students with images or videos of similar performances, and the venue location, can help to lessen the uncertainty.

Strategy 6B

Show students the performance arena or tasks in accessible ways

A useful way of increasing exposure to the possible performance situation is to find videos or clips on popular websites which show what a typical performance may look like. For example, there are numerous examples on the internet of video clips showing different musical grade examinations.

By exposing your student to these videos, your students will start to become familiar with what to expect on the day of the performance. Students can then familiarise themselves with either the task, the situation or the performance venue in order to lessen the uncertainty of what is likely to happen at the performance time. Also, if possible, rehearse in or visit the venue to be familiar with the surroundings and performance space.

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 7B

Guided imagery script – Encouraging students to imagine themselves performing their piece

Students use their imagination all the time to think about what could happen in the future. Using imagination is a powerful way of encouraging students to recreate the emotions and thoughts that are likely to arise when they are in the performance situation. By encouraging students to imagine the thoughts, feelings and emotions they will experience, students will become gradually more familiar with these thoughts, feelings and emotions over time and,

importantly, in a safe way where students can stop the exercise if the feelings become too strong. Over time, students' responses to these anxiety symptoms will become less powerful and less distracting, so that, on the day of the performance, they can handle these emotions well. Regular practice (every day if possible) with the imagery script should be encouraged in the week leading up to the performance.

Strategy 7B

An imagery performance script

A sample imagery script for teachers, and parents, to use to guide students through an imagined future performance is detailed overleaf. The script can be modified to be made more specific for the student's upcoming performance. When following this script, students can either imagine themselves from inside themselves looking outwards at the venue (as they

will see it when they perform) or from outside themselves watching themselves performing, for example, from above or sat in the audience. Using imagination in this way is not easy, so don't force students if they find it difficult at first. With practice, their ability to imagine themselves performing will improve.

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Example mental preparation imagery script

- Take a comfortable seating position with your back straight, your feet flat to the floor and place your hands on your legs so that they are comfortable.
- Close your eyes and place one hand on your stomach.
- Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and out through your mouth. Make the hand on your stomach rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.
- Breathe in slowly and deeply. Breathe to your back, your ribs and sides three times.
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Imagine your breathing as you prepare for your performance. Now, imagine walking to your performance area in the performance venue and notice how normal this feels. Imagine what this venue looks like on the day of your performance. Notice the size of the area, other people in the venue and the noises being made in the room.
- Take a deep breath in and feel your stomach push your hand up. Now, in your performance area, take a look around you. Notice how comfortable you feel here. Notice that you belong here. This is where you are meant to perform. Notice how nice an experience it is to feel this comfortable. Allow yourself to smile at how nice it is to be asked to perform.
- Imagine yourself ready to perform in the venue you will perform at. Take one last look around you at the venue. Now, imagine you are a giant. Notice how your musical instrument feels comfortable to you. It is easy to play and handle.
- Imagine your feet are giant feet and your hands are giant hands. They enable you to play your musical instrument with ease. Can you feel them? Imagine the feel of your feet and hands as you imagine yourself in the venue ready to perform.
- Imagine you have a powerful chest and arms. Your chest and arms feel ready for this moment and you are ready to perform. Imagine what this feels like. Your whole body now feels powerful and ready. You are breathing comfortably which will enable you to perform well today. Can you feel it?
- Now, imagine your mind is as fast and agile as a gazelle's. All that practice you have done so far has led to you feeling this good and ready for your performance. Your mind knows what it has to do today and it will do it. Notice that your mind is ready and prepared for a good performance.
- Breathe in slowly and deeply three more times. Feel the power in your body. You are ready. Imagine hearing those first few notes you will play in your performance and notice how your body moves in line with those notes. You are ready to perform. Notice how your mind and body are both prepared to perform. Notice that this is a nice feeling.
- Imagine yourself performing the pieces you have prepared. Notice your body moving in time to the music and playing the music exactly as you have practised it. Imagine yourself enjoying the feel of the music as you play it. Imagine how good your body feels playing this piece of music and how enjoyable it is. Feel your body move to generate the music being played and how natural this is.
- Hear your mind flowing with the music inside it and notice how your breath changes in line with the movement of the music. Imagine playing your whole piece from start to finish.
- Once you have played your piece, keep breathing and imagine yourself in the performance area again. Take a look around you. Notice how calm and still the performance area is. How happy everyone is and how happy you are. Enjoy this moment.
- When you are ready, place your hands by your side and slowly open your eyes.
- Congratulate yourself on a good performance.

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 8B

Set goals for your students that will naturally progress them into the performance

Setting goals is a very useful way for teachers to remind students of the processes they need to follow to perform well. Asking students to focus on their goals for the upcoming performance is an essential way of diverting their mental energy and attention into something that will help them perform well. Achieving these goals in the week leading up to performance can also provide students with greater confidence and self-belief that they will perform well.

Having a series of short-term goals in the days leading up to the performance time will help stop the student's mind from jumping into the future and worrying about the performance. Emphasis throughout this week should be on process and performance goals that will help them perform well once the performance time arrives.

Strategy 8B

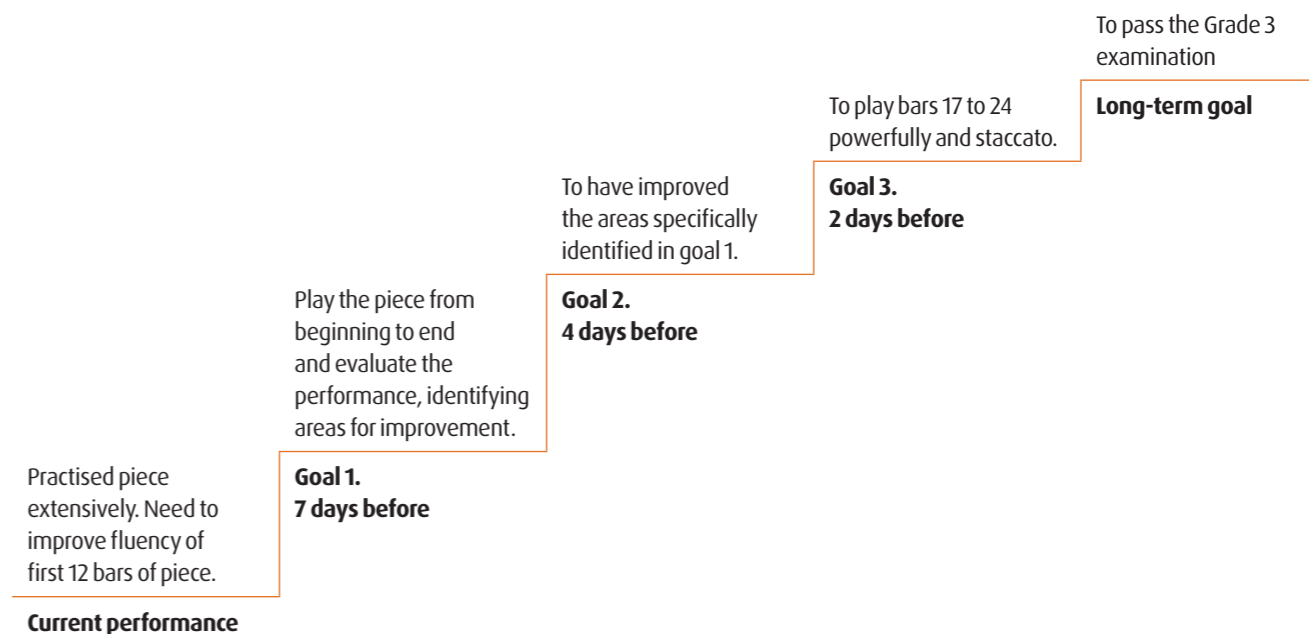
Staircase goals for the week leading up to the performance

(Adapted from Bump, 1989)⁸

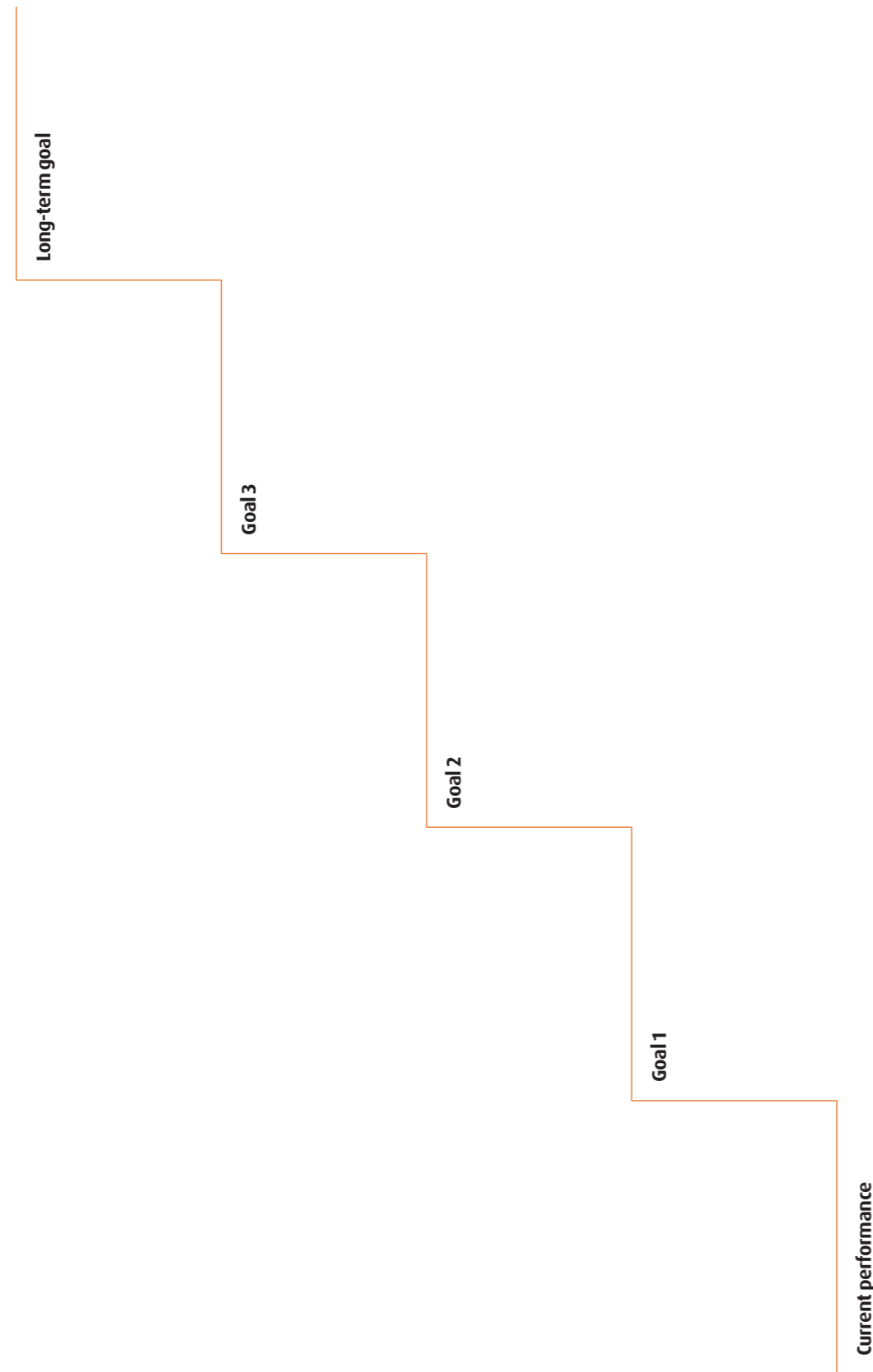
This goal-setting sheet works well if completed in conjunction with the practice timetable for one week prior to the performance. Strategy 8B is an example of how this could be used to progress the student through the week leading to a performance.

Instructions: Determine a goal toward which you are striving (e.g. passing this Grade 3 piano exam) and insert this at the top of the staircase. Then, determine your current performance level at that task (e.g. need to sharpen performance at start). Finally, in the blank staircase provided below, list three progressively more challenging goals that move you toward achieving your long-term goal. Read it from the bottom upwards

Example of staircase goals



Blank staircase for your student's own goals



Area 9B
Progressive muscle relaxation

One of the key components of any musical performance is to have sufficiently prepared muscles. Anxiety commonly leads to a tensing of muscles, making successful performance very difficult. The following two examples of muscle relaxation exercises are for teachers and parents to practise with students to help ease many of the common physical tension symptoms of anxiety. The first is for older students while the second one is for younger students – the teacher should decide on a case-by-case basis which version is most relevant. These scripts are flexible and should be adapted to fit the requirements of the student based on how and where they most commonly experience tension. Consideration should

also be given to the most important muscle groups to focus on during each exercise, based on the musical performance being given. For younger students, asking them to use their imagination when completing the exercises can be very beneficial in promoting muscle relaxation. Design a script that works best for your students, for example, if they enjoy the exercise and feel it helps them, extend the period of pause time between each muscle group. Alternatively, repeat tensing each muscle group two or three times to deepen the relaxation felt. Depending on the age of the students, you may find it useful to model the moves as you talk through the script.

Strategy 9B
Progressive muscle relaxation exercise

Example for older students:

Throughout this exercise you will be asked to tense and relax different muscle groups in sequence. When tensing, be sure not to over-exert yourself as this can lead to greater tension or potential damage to the muscle. It is important that attention is focussed on each muscle group in turn as we progress with the exercise. If you experience pain or discomfort in any of the muscle groups as the exercise progresses, feel free to omit that group or stop. If that pain has been present for a long time, it is recommended that a specialist is consulted for help. To help you stay mentally engaged with the exercise, try to notice how your muscles feel as the exercise progresses and the differences in the feeling between a tense muscle and a relaxed one.

Find a comfortable, warm room in which you can sit or lie down and where you are unlikely to be disturbed. Begin by allowing your mind to focus on different muscle groups in turn, starting at the top of your head and moving down through the rest of your body. Do not tense your muscles yet, just scan your body and notice how all your muscles feel. You may feel more tension in some areas than others. This is natural. Your mind will wander as you scan your body. This is also natural. If your mind wanders, just kindly direct it back to the muscles you had reached.

Now, begin by curling your toes into a ball. Hold the tension in your toes for five seconds and release your toes. Notice how the toes feel as the tension is released.

[Pause for five seconds]

Move your attention to your calf muscles. These are not so easy to tense. Try tensing your calf muscles by pulling your toes up. Pay full attention to tensing your calf muscles. Hold the tension in your calf muscles for five seconds before releasing. Notice the feel of your calf muscles as the tension flows out of them.

[Pause for five seconds]

Next, we will tense your thigh muscles. This is easiest to do by pushing your knees against each other. Hold that tension in your thighs for five seconds. And release. Notice the tension leaving your thighs.

[Pause for five seconds]

We will now generate tension in your buttocks. Imagine tensing your buttocks to lift your hips up high. Feel your hips rise as you tense your buttocks. Hold for five seconds. As you release, notice the fall of your hips as the tension leaves these muscles in your body.

[Pause for five seconds]

Continued overleaf →

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

We are now going to stretch your lower back. Direct your attention to your lower back and pull it into your stomach. Feel as if somebody is pushing your lower back from behind. Hold that tension for five seconds. Then release. Notice what happens to your stomach as you release the tension.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now imagine a person pushing your stomach in from the front. Hold your stomach in as if a person will not allow you to breathe out. Hold this for five seconds. Imagine the person has stopped pushing and release your stomach. Notice how your stomach moves as you release it.

[Pause for five seconds]

We will now stretch your upper back. Pull your shoulders back as if you are trying to get your shoulder blades to touch in the middle of your back. Notice how this stretch makes your back muscles feel. Hold this stretch for five seconds. Release the tension and notice how the rest of your body reacts.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now turn your attention to your chest. Take a deep, deep breath to expand your chest as far as you can. Imagine the air filling up your lungs as you breathe very deeply. Keep breathing in to the count of five. Release the tension by exhaling quickly. Notice how quickly the air leaves your lungs and how quickly your chest deflates.

[Pause for five seconds]

To tense your shoulders, give a big shrug. Pull those shoulders up towards your ears. Try to touch your ears. Hold that shrug for five seconds. Then release. Notice how heavy your shoulders feel as they drop down.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now move your attention to your hands. Clench your hands into fists and squeeze tightly. Hold this squeeze for five seconds and notice the tension in your hands and all the way up your arms. Release your fists and feel the tension flow out of your arms and hands.

[Pause for five seconds]

Follow your arms up to your biceps. Tense your biceps by focussing on trying to make them appear bigger. Hold the tension in your biceps. Then release. Notice the feel of the muscle as the tension is released and it drops.

[Pause for five seconds]

I want you to now imagine that you want to see something above the top of your head. To do this you need to roll your head backwards as far as possible. Try not to over-exert yourself when doing this. Hold the tension in your neck for five seconds. Then release.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now, I want you to imagine waking up in the morning and doing a loud yawn. Stretch your mouth as wide as you can. Feel the stretch in your mouth. Hold this stretch for five seconds before letting go. Notice how your mouth feels once the tension is released.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now squeeze your eyes tight shut. Really feel your eyes being squeezed by the eyelids. Hold the squeeze for five seconds. When you release, notice how this makes you feel.

[Pause for five seconds]

Slowly focus your attention on your breathing again. Notice as your breath goes in and out. Slowly stand up and notice any differences in your muscles. You may still have areas of tension. That is normal. Try to notice what is different in the way you physically feel.

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Example for younger students:

Progressive muscle relaxation is easy to teach to young students. The aim is to make the exercise as accessible as possible by modifying it where appropriate. Maintaining a steady speed throughout is important to ensure that students do not feel rushed. At various times throughout this exercise students are asked to imagine themselves as different animals to encourage full completion and enjoyment of the exercise.

Find a comfortable space and stand up. Allow your body to be flexible and try to make your breathing as steady as possible. Try to breathe in for three through your nose and out for three through your mouth.

Now yawn like a monkey would yawn in the morning. Really open your mouth wide to feel how wide you can stretch your mouth.

[Pause for five seconds]

Squeeze your face together like you are eating a lemon. Really taste that tart juice coming from the lemon.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now imagine you are a giraffe with a long neck. You want to reach some leaves in a really tall tree. To do this you have to stretch your neck as high as possible. Try reaching your face up to stretch your neck really high. Hold that stretch. Then let your head drop down again.

[Pause for five seconds]

Imagine you are a bear. You see some lovely apples in a tree but you have to stretch really high to grab these apples. Keeping your feet on the floor, try to reach as high as you can with your arms and hands to pick those apples. Keep your hands and arms up high for five seconds. Release those arms and let them fall by your side.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now, get down onto your hands and knees and think of yourself as a cat. You are a cat who has just woken from a sleep and wants to stretch its back. Stretch your back like a cat would do. Really arch your back so that you can reach as far as possible. Hold that stretch like that for five seconds. Then let your body return to normal.

[Pause for five seconds]

Staying as a cat for the moment, arch your back upwards into the sky so that you can feel your stomach pushing upwards. Hold that stretch for five seconds. Then release it back to normal and stand up again.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now, stand on your tiptoes like a meerkat. You've all seen a meerkat. It stands up high to try and see as far ahead of it as it can. Stand up as high as you can on your tiptoes. Keep reaching up high to see as far as you can reach. Now stop and let your legs bring you back down to a standing position. Feel the tension running out of your legs.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now, shake all of your body. Shake your arms, legs, hands, feet, head and stomach. Shake your body all over. Shake for five seconds. Then stop.

[Pause for five seconds]

Now listen to your breathing again. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you listen to your breathing, any tension in your body should have eased away. You may still feel some tension, but this is normal.

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 10B

Emotion journal – Writing down emotions helps to be aware of them

This emotion journal is designed for use in the week leading up to the performance. It is expected that students will start to experience more instances of anxiety (e.g. increased heart rate, negative thoughts) as the performance date nears. As the time to perform gets closer, the intensity and frequency of those anxious feelings is likely to increase. By keeping this journal in the week leading up to the performance,

students can start to become aware of these feelings and how they make them feel. The writing down or recording of their thoughts, emotions and feelings will help students to become aware of, and familiar with them. Students may then also start to see similar responses arising a lot of the time and they can record strategies that were effective in helping them handle those responses.

Strategy 10B

Example questions for an emotion journal

For older students:

1. Did I think about the upcoming performance today?
2. If I did, what happened to my body and my mind? What thoughts, feelings and emotions did I experience?
3. How did I handle these different thoughts, feelings and emotions?
4. What was particularly effective for me today?

For younger students:

1. Did I think about the upcoming performance today?
2. If I did, what did I say to myself and what did I feel?
3. What did I do when these things happened and what happened then?

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 11B

Acceptance of emotions – Don't fight your feelings, just experience them

If students spend time trying to fight or remove hurtful emotions, they can often lose focus on what they need to do to perform well. Accepting emotions for what they are – natural responses to situations that cannot hurt you – will allow your students to be much more accepting of these emotions. The negative consequences of these emotions

will then diminish. In the exercise below, the annoying person at your musical rehearsal is a metaphor for performance anxiety. Therefore, accepting this person (anxiety), rather than fighting their presence, helps to maintain attention on key performance tasks to playing your music well.

Strategy 11B

Acceptance metaphor

(Adapted from Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012)⁹

A metaphor to promote acceptance of performance anxiety

Imagine you are playing in a musical group in a hall with all of your best friends. Your best friends are all competent musicians. You have been playing for 15 minutes and are really enjoying yourselves. Suddenly, the door opens and in walks someone you know. You don't like this person. They are frequently rude about you. You know that your friends don't like this person either. You continue playing but soon realise that this person is annoying you. You feel the music is not as good because of this person and you want them to leave. You therefore stop playing and ask them to leave. However, they refuse. They continue to annoy you and won't stop. In the meantime, your friends have continued to play and you have been left behind. You are annoyed, and after a while, you persuade the person to leave the hall. You return to your seat and begin playing again. However, just as you start to enjoy the music again, this person walks back into the hall and sits down again. You immediately recognise this person and you once again stop playing and spend ten minutes persuading this person to leave. Eventually they leave. As before, everyone else carries on without you. You start playing again, when, for a third time, this person comes back into the hall.

This time though, all your friends stop playing. They ask you to allow this person to remain in the hall and accept that he can be there. Your friends ask you to focus on your performance instead of focussing on this person. You agree. It is difficult to do because your mind frequently wanders to thinking about this person. However, over time, you manage to focus your attention on your music rather than this person. After 20 minutes you realise that you have been playing music without this person's presence distracting you. In fact, they are now starting to enjoy being with everyone else. Everyone else seems to have accepted this person too. This person has therefore stopped being a nuisance and you have been performing well. You sit back, still very mindful of this person's presence, and re-focus your efforts on playing well and enjoying yourself again. By the time you stop playing, you have had a great time, played really well and this person has remained seated in the hall without annoying you all the time. You smile as you leave the hall and look forward to the next rehearsal.

⁹ Hayes, S C, Strosahl, K D, & Wilson, K G (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change*. 2nd Ed. New York: The Guildford Press.

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 12B

Pre-performance routine sheet – What are the steps immediately prior to starting a performance?

Pre-performance routines help performers to view a performance as just another normal action that they have done before. They help to convince the performer that they are ready to perform by focussing their attention on what they need to do to perform well rather than how anxious they are. They are used in a vast array of performance domains – often without thinking about it. It is very likely that your students will have some form of pre-performance routine which they use already. If so, it may be necessary to modify what they do to enhance its effectiveness.

A pre-performance routine will assist the student in feeling prepared for a performance by focussing their attention on the performance in hand. In the week leading up to a performance, it is recommended that students rehearse their pre-performance routine every time they practice their music. This will help them to cope well with any nerves or anxiety they may be feeling. The attached sheet guides teachers through the steps on how to generate an effective routine with their students.

Strategy 12B

Design and practise a routine to perform immediately before performance

The idea behind having a routine immediately prior to a performance is to create consistency. A good pre-performance routine should help the musician release tension from their body, promote a belief that they will perform well and lead into the start of a successful performance. Pre-performance routines are commonly used across many performance domains, including by sportspeople and actors.

Designing a pre-performance routine should be undertaken with the student. It should have distinct sections to help progression from pre-performance into actual performance. The routine should incorporate a thought element,

a behavioural element, a breathing element and a trigger to begin. By completing the table below with your student, and then encouraging your student to test and modify where appropriate, your student will be able to develop an effective routine.

As a starting point, it is useful to ask the student to recollect a time when they have performed well in the past and what they did before this performance. This will help to form the basis of an effective pre-performance routine that can then be used as the performance time nears. The routine will flow over a very short period of time (seconds) prior to each performance.

Thought Element What do you think about before you are about to perform that helps you to perform well? This could be the opening bars of the performance or the theme of the performance.	
Behavioural Element What action will you take after your thought that will let you know you are ready to begin? This could be to nod your head or to sit upright.	
Breathing Element Once you have completed your behaviour above, what type of breath lets you know you are ready to perform? This could be a deep breath or a shallow breath.	
Trigger/activation word or phrase What word or phrase gets you activated to perform immediately? For example, this could make you more alert 'Let's go!' or give you confidence 'I can do this!'	

Part B – 7 days to 1 day prior to performance

Area 13B

Cognitive reframing exercise – Help your students to think helpfully about the performance

In the week leading up to a performance, it is not unusual for students to experience negative thoughts about their potential future performance. These thoughts may be perceived by the student as being unhelpful. They may make students question their ability and whether they actually want to perform or not. A useful way of overcoming this problem is to ask your students to reframe these thoughts. Reframing is a way of changing an unhelpful thought into

a helpful one. It helps change the feeling generated by a thought from one that promotes avoiding the performance to one that makes the performer want to perform. So, for example, if a student tells themselves 'I am not good enough' then this can be changed to 'I am good enough and this performance will show how much I have developed'. Alternatively, the student may reframe 'I am not ready for this' to 'I have practised very hard and am ready'.

Strategy 13B

Cognitive reframing form

On the sheet below insert the most common thoughts your student experiences in the week leading up to a performance. Work with your student to then reframe how these thoughts can be made to be more helpful.

Original thought:	Reframed thought:
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

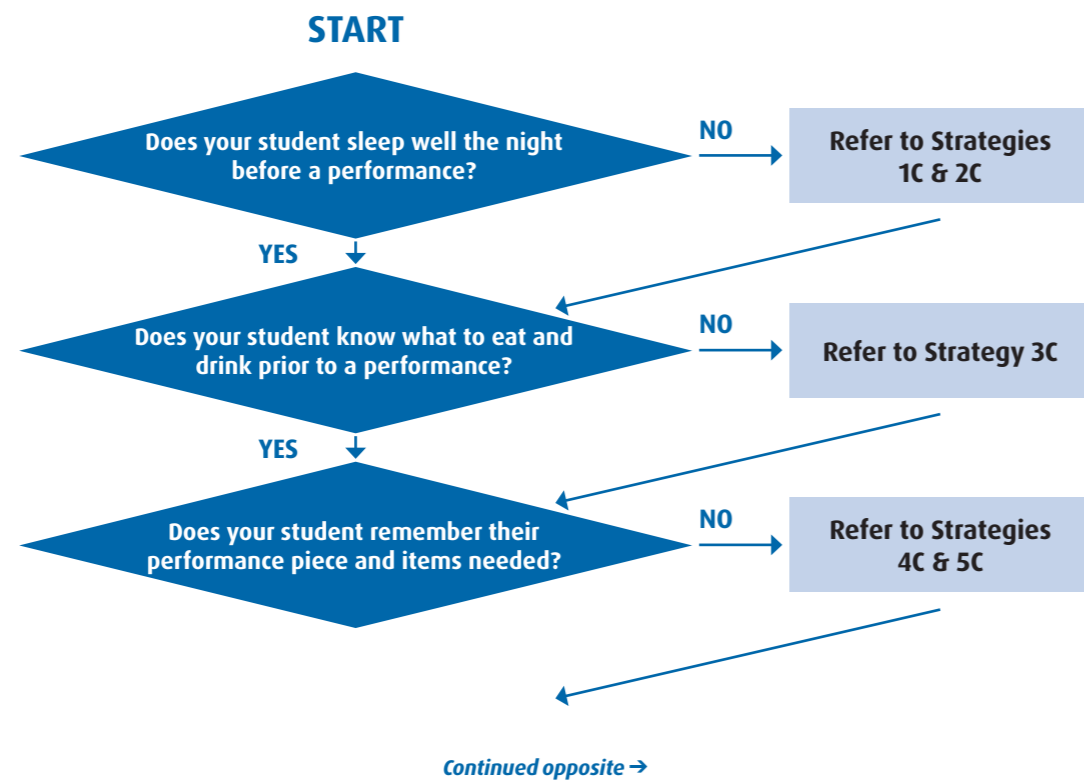
Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

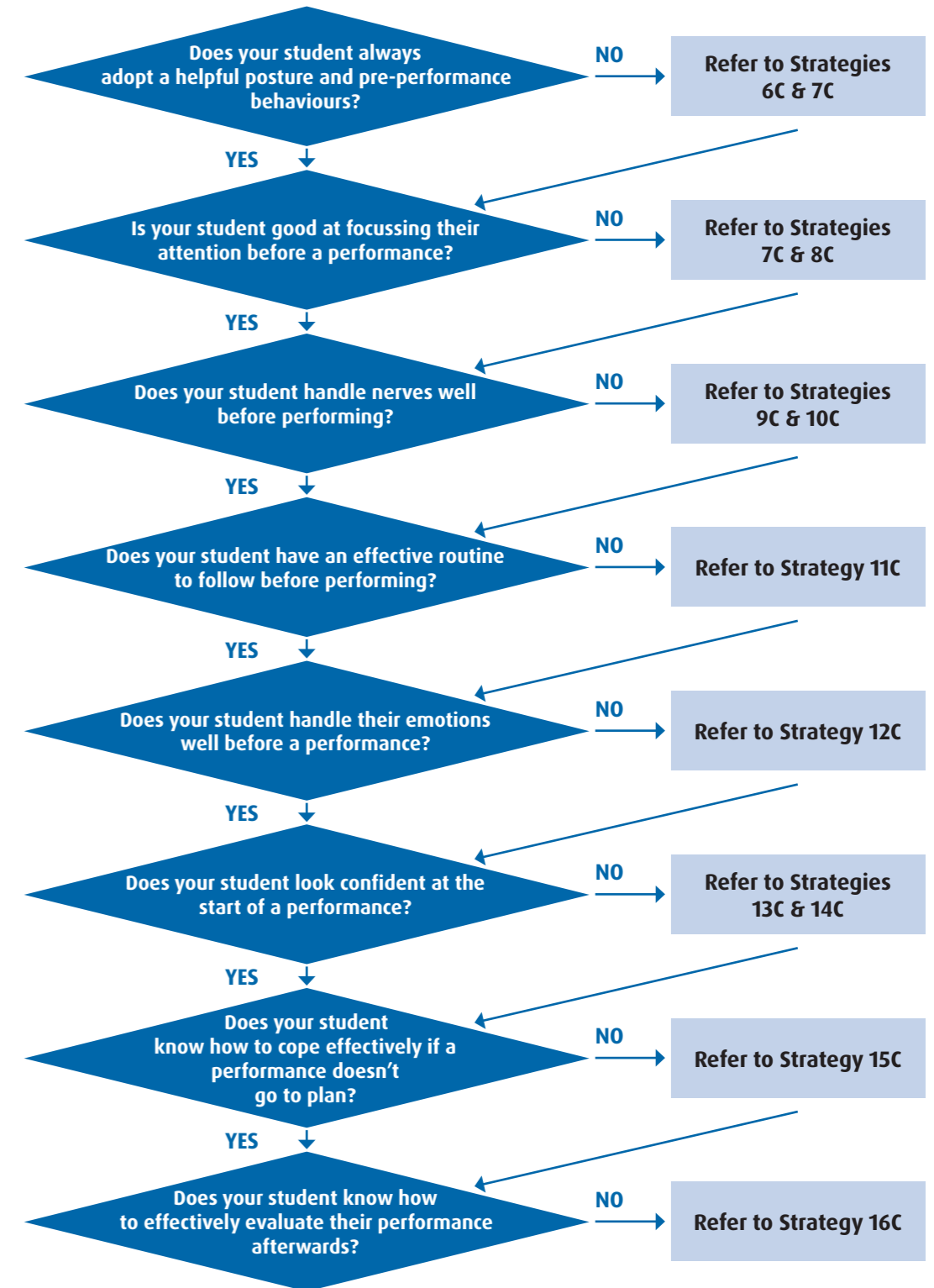
Part C of the booklet recommends effective coping strategies and techniques that teachers, and parents, can develop in musicians, in the build up to, throughout, and after the performance. It identifies common response patterns to performance anxiety occurring throughout this emotionally charged time period. Strategies focusing on sleep, nutrition, pre-performance routines, breathing techniques, body posture, performance checklists, concentration whilst performing and effective evaluation are all provided to help students manage their performance anxiety. The aim of these strategies is to help students develop strong self-confidence and emotional resilience.

Flowchart C provides a series of questions for teachers to answer in order to arrive at a suitable potential strategy that students can use during this very emotional time period. However, as with the strategies outlined in Parts A & B, embedding many of the strategies over time will help promote a healthy approach to, and excitement about, performing.

Flowchart C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance



Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance



Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 1C

Recording thoughts and emotions the night before a performance

Our ability to be confident about an upcoming performance is influenced by many things, but none more so than our past achievements and accomplishments in a similar setting. If this is the first performance the student has had to undertake, keeping a diary of thoughts and emotions up to the night before the performance provides a means of diverting attention from the worry and concerns that may naturally arise.

Strategy 1C

Record diary of performance thoughts and concerns: Writing down emotions and thoughts helps to make them less threatening

A diary will provide a useful tool to be used in the future when asked to perform again. The student can then reflect on what they did on previous occasions and highlight those actions that were effective. Equally, any thoughts, emotions and behaviours experienced last time will help to show the student that such experiences are a natural part of the performance process and not something unusual or to be feared. This diary provides a useful summary of pre-performance preparation that can be shared with the teacher/parent (if both are happy with that) to help provide more adaptive and appropriate strategies in the future.

For older students:

1. Did I think about the upcoming performance today? If so, how often?
2. What thoughts, feelings and emotions did I experience?
3. How did I handle these different thoughts, feelings and emotions?
4. What was particularly effective for me today?

For younger students:

1. Did I think about the upcoming performance today? How many times?
2. What did I say to myself?
3. What did I feel?

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 2C

The importance of a good night's sleep

The night before a performance can be very difficult for performers. The mind will often jump forward to the performance the next day and all the worries and concerns about what will happen. This can make getting to sleep very difficult. Anxiety is very hard to control and while some students may sleep well the night before a performance, others may have a very restless sleep. Disruptions to normal sleep patterns can create tiredness which in turn can lead to poorer performance. From a mental viewpoint, the mind will often struggle to focus attention on performance enhancing areas if not fully rested. Physically, if a student is less alert then the chance of performing well is also inhibited.

Strategy 2C

Maintain a normal sleep routine

Students should try to maintain their usual sleep preparation prior to a performance. Promoting normal sleeping patterns will encourage performers to view the performance as a normal activity and therefore not something to worry or stress about. If students find that they have difficulty getting to sleep due to concerns about the upcoming performance, they should be encouraged to use the imagery script designed with them as a means of focussing their thoughts and physiology on a good performance. This will help them to approach sleep in the same way they normally do.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 3 onwards shifts the focus to the day of the performance

Area 3C

Appropriate nutrition and hydration – Eat and drink to promote a good performance

In order for a body to function well it needs to be appropriately fuelled. The mind is the same. It needs appropriate levels of hydration, energy and rest. The demands of a performance will vary which is why no

one specific routine for eating and drinking will be perfect. However, remembering certain key recommendations for effective performance is vital.

Strategy 3C Food and drink

Ensure that the student drinks enough water starting a few days prior to the performance. On the day of the performance, encourage the student to drink sufficient water to ensure they are well hydrated.

The mind uses a lot of energy when working. Energy usage requires sugar uptake by the brain and other performance muscles. It is therefore essential that students eat a well-balanced meal two hours prior to performance. This should include complex carbohydrates (like potatoes, rice or bread) and protein (such as meat, cheese or lentils). These foods will release energy slowly into the body over a number of hours and will enable the student to feel fully prepared for their performance and have sufficient energy to maintain concentration and attention throughout the performance.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 4C

Performance checklist – Have you got everything?

All performances have different requirements – such as duration, location, audience, purpose, individual or in groups – which will mean that no performance checklist sheet will be sufficient for every performance. However, using the idea of a performance checklist from part B of this booklet,

students will feel confident they have everything they need to perform well before leaving for the performance venue. As before, it may be beneficial to encourage parents to assist in the checking on the day of the performance.

Strategy 4C Day of performance checklist

An example of a performance checklist is detailed below:

Example day of performance checklist

This checklist is a final reminder of all the items you will need to take with you for your upcoming performance. Complete the checklist before you set off.

Please make sure you have the following items:

1. Your musical instrument including all the necessary sections and accessories (refer to the list you made in part B of this booklet). Please check your instrument is in good working order – e.g. strings, valves, slides, reeds etc.
2. Items to tune your instrument (if required)
3. Any printed music, audio recordings and lead sheets
4. A bottle of water
5. Food you may need
6. Details of your performance location
7. Your performance confirmation sheet
8. Personal identification (as required)
9. Performance clothing (as required)

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 5C

Focus! – Reminder of opening bars of each work

On the day of a performance a student may experience anxiety in the form of thoughts, feelings and emotions which may distract them from paying full attention to their performance. It is not unusual for performers to try to fight these thoughts and feelings in order to make them go away. Some of the strategies in this booklet are designed to help students do this effectively. One such example is to have the student re-focus their attention onto something related to their performance. This has two main benefits:

- (i) They will focus on an item that will help them to perform well in their performance; and
- (ii) They will stop focussing on something that is irrelevant to their performance.

Focussing attention is not an easy skill to develop and it requires practice. That is why strategies to practise focussing attention are included in the earlier parts of this booklet. However, on the day of the performance, it is useful to ask students to focus their attention on the opening bars of their performance. The ideal state for a performer is automaticity – namely that they are performing with minimal or no conscious effort. It is very difficult to achieve this objective from the first note but by starting well a performer can then enhance their confidence that their body knows what it is doing and can do it.

Strategy 5C

Attention exercise: Focus your mind on how the performance begins

(Adapted from Gardner & Moore, 2007)¹⁰

This brief exercise will help you focus on the opening part of your performance. There is no timescale for this to be completed in. However, it is useful to complete the whole exercise several hours prior to your performance.

Please take a comfortable position that you believe will closely resemble your position at the start of your performance today. This may be standing or seated. Briefly pause in that position for a few seconds as if waiting to begin. Notice the position of your arms and hands. Then notice the position of your feet, legs and body. Now bring your attention to your head. Notice the sound of your breathing as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Breathe in and out for several breaths.

Now notice the sounds of the room you are in. Just notice the sounds occurring around you. Now notice the thoughts as they enter your mind. Don't try to change those thoughts. Just notice them without judging what they are telling you. Now, think about your upcoming performance and notice any changes that happen to your body.

Imagine yourself as you are about to begin your performance. Feel yourself prepared and ready to begin.

Now think about the start of the piece you are about to play. Imagine the position of your body as you are about to begin. Notice your hands, arms, legs and body as you await those first notes. Now imagine performing those first few notes. Imagine the feel of your body as you perform the opening notes of your piece. Notice how your breath changes in line with the music. Notice what key things your mind pays attention to as you begin your piece and keep your attention focussed on those things.

Once you have begun playing, allow the music to end. Just allow your mind to come back to the room in which you are located. Notice the noises surrounding you again and your breath as you breathe in and as you breathe out. When you are ready, nod your head and remember the key points you need to focus your attention on when starting your performance.

¹⁰ Gardner, F L & Moore, Z E (2007) *The psychology of enhancing human performance: The Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) Approach*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 6C

Behaviour/posture reminder sheet – Remember how to stand, sit, rest and position yourself

While we often think that our mind influences our behaviour, the opposite often happens. When anxiety is present it often impacts our body language first which in turn leads to negative thoughts. Our bodies can frequently react to anxiety by becoming rigid and tense, or slouched – positions

which potentially inhibit your ability to perform well and to feel and look confident. For these reasons, it is often helpful to provide students with a reminder sheet to encourage them to be aware of their body posture, including eye contact, on the day of the performance.

Strategy 6C

Body posture reminder sheet

Our body posture often leads to poor performance as long as it is not observed. The sheet below will help you to check your body posture on the day of the performance and provide you with a suggestion to encourage a more positive body position and one that is likely to help you feel and perform better.

My Body Posture	Changed Body Posture
How are my shoulders?	Push shoulders back
How is my back?	Reach up from the lower back
How is my neck?	Turn head left, right, up then down
How are my arms?	Circle your arms clockwise
Where am I looking?	Make eye contact with other musicians/look at the music
How is my chest?	Expand your chest when breathing in
How is my balance?	Create a balanced stance
How is my breath?	Breathe and blow out like the wind

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Areas 7C to 14C refer to the time period of 5 hours – 1 hour prior to the performance

Area 7C

Breathing techniques – How to use your breath to prepare for performance

Breathing is essential to the successful performance of any musical piece. Anxiety can have a very strong impact on breath control – commonly acting to increase the speed of breathing or to make breathing shallow. A brief breathing exercise that can be easily undertaken in the hours leading up to the performance time will help students be physically prepared for their performance. Breathing exercises

can also help to calm down the emotional impact of anxiety – such as worry, panic and fear. The aim of this exercise is to regulate the performer's breathing. By breathing out for longer than they breathe in, they will slow down their breathing and mind. It should be noted that this exercise is not designed to create an ideal performance state. It is only applicable if the student needs to calm their emotional system.

Strategy 7C

Two minute breathing exercise

Stop whatever you are doing at this moment. Allow yourself two minutes to perform this quick and easy breathing exercise.

Listen to your breath. Place one hand on your stomach and allow the other arm to relax. As you listen to your breath, notice what happens to your hand. As you breathe in, you should notice your hand move out. As you breathe out, your hand should move inwards. Next, you are going to breathe out for longer than you will breathe in. Now breathe in for the count of two and try to ensure your hand rises further than it did the time before. Then breathe out to the count of four. Repeat this breathing exercise five times.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 8C

Brief centering exercise – How to focus your student's attention on the upcoming performance

(Adapted from Gardner & Moore, 2007)

On the day of a performance it is not uncommon for a performer's thoughts to leap into the future. The performer's attention may be taken away from the present moment by questions about the consequences of the performance ('What will others think? What if I fail? What if I look silly?'). Such questions can also lead the performer to doubt their ability which can lead to drops in their level of self-belief, potentially resulting in a poorer performance. Fighting such

thoughts can take a lot of mental effort and energy. An exercise that is designed to bring a performer's mind back to the present moment is an effective means of overcoming these worries and concerns. Of course, if the performer seems to be happy thinking about the future then this exercise is not necessary. It is only necessary when the thoughts interfere with preparation for the future performance and should take approximately one minute.

Strategy 8C

Centering exercise

This exercise is designed to be taught to students so that, over time, they are able to use it whenever it is needed to direct their attention.

Wherever you are, stop what you are doing. If you are aware that your thoughts are not helpful stand up and wiggle your toes. Just wiggle your toes. Notice how your toes feel against the ground. Then shake your legs. Just stand there and wiggle one leg at a time. After that, swing your arms round in circles. Just notice how your arms feel against the air. Now wiggle your fingers. Notice your fingers move. Now, open your mouth really wide. Notice how your mouth is fully stretched. And close your mouth again. Close your eyes and slowly breathe in and out three times. Open your eyes and notice that you feel ready to perform.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 9C

Rationalisation exercise – Making the performance a normal part of learning

In the lead up to a performance, it is very easy for students to forget the reasons for the performance. Instead, the focus will often be on the performance itself and any concerns or anxiety they may be feeling about the outcome. In these circumstances, it is useful for students to have a list they can refer to. This will remind them of the role of

the performance as a small part of a holistic musical learning journey. It should also act to provide reinforcement of the positive aspects to be achieved from performance. Ideally, this should also be linked to the goals identified with the student throughout their development.

Strategy 9C

Example reminder sheet

A reminder sheet may look like the following:

The audience supports you.
This performance is a small step in your long-term development in music.
You are allowed to embrace this performance. There is nothing to fear here.
Performing is fun. Once you start, you will really enjoy it.
Everyone wants you to do well.
You will learn a lot about your love of music through this performance.
It is exciting to perform in front of people.
All great performers suffer from stage fright at some point. It is perfectly natural and can help you to perform well.
You are ready for this performance. You have worked very hard to get to this stage.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 10C

Imagery sheet – Use imagination to look forward to the upcoming performance

Utilising imagery on the day of the performance is a key way of encouraging performers to look forward to performing. Imagining yourself performing well has been shown to be very helpful in promoting greater self-belief and confidence for the

upcoming performance. On the day of the performance, it is most helpful to imagine positive scenarios and to replace negative scenarios with positive ones.

Strategy 10C

A short imagery script to encourage performers to imagine a good performance

Take a seat where you are comfortable. Sit upright with your arms resting on your legs and pay attention to your breathing. Noticing your breath as it comes in and as it goes out. Notice those areas of your body that move as you breathe. Notice your chest as it moves up and down. Notice your stomach too.

Now imagine yourself as you approach the performance arena. Notice what the venue looks like from outside and imagine yourself feeling confident as you enter through the door. Imagine yourself going into the performance arena. Take a deep breath and take in the smells of the venue. Notice what the venue smells like and how it looks. Imagine yourself walking into the performance arena and the sounds you will hear. Feel your confidence knowing that you are going to perform well. You have practised for this moment and now you can enjoy it. You know the pieces you are playing and you know your body is ready to play them. You are ready to perform. Take a deep breath and release that breath. Know that you are happy to be there and notice how ready you are to perform. This is what you have been practising for. All those hours have been spent getting you ready for this event.

Now imagine yourself taking your performance position. Imagine yourself ready to perform. Feel what it is like. Experience the excitement of playing / singing / performing to other people. This is a real privilege and one that you can enjoy. You are now ready to start your piece. Take a breath and imagine yourself performing well exactly as you have practised. Hear the beautiful music as you perform your music in front of these people who want you to do well. Hear the music as you continue your performance. Notice how relaxed you feel. Notice too how enjoyable it is to perform a musical piece. Carry on imagining in this way until your musical piece finishes.

At the end of your performance, look around. Notice how happy the people are. Notice how happy you feel now. You have performed well and people are happy that you have performed well. Enjoy this moment. This is the moment of joy. Feel the joy. It is wonderful.

When you are ready, bring yourself back into the present moment. Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out three times. Then slowly open your eyes.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 11C

Pre-performance routine – What happens immediately prior to starting a performance?

The idea behind having a routine immediately prior to a performance is to create consistency. A good pre-performance routine should help the musician release tension from their body, promote a belief that they will perform well and lead into the start of a successful performance.

Strategy 11C

Carrying out the pre-performance routine

Your student should remember the pre-performance routine developed in strategy 12B and work their way through this immediately prior to the start of the performance.

Area 12C

Acceptance – Don't fight your emotions, accept them

(Adapted from Gardener & Moore, 2007)

Performers experience numerous emotions prior to a performance. It is not uncommon for anxiety to appear more and more frequently, the closer the performer gets to performance time. Emotions can often be perceived as being helpful or unhelpful. This kind of perception can then impact performance. The labelling of emotions as helpful or unhelpful creates a lot of problems in performers and can lead to poor performance. With this in mind, encouraging performers to accept the emotions they are experiencing as being natural, helps them to preserve energy. It also helps to lessen the impact of those emotions.

Strategy 12C

Acceptance of emotions script

I want you to notice what emotions are present in your body at the present time. I want you to identify what they are. I don't want you to try to alter these emotions. I want you to observe these emotions as you would observe another person. You may want these emotions to leave but it is likely they will return if you do that. You will have to put up with these emotions returning to you if you tell them to leave. Instead, I want you to take a deep breath in and to talk to your emotions. For example: 'Hello fear. It is you again'; 'Oh, excitement, nice to meet you again.' Notice that when you accept the emotion's presence, its impact lessens. Notice how it doesn't feel quite as scary or loud as it did when it first arrived. Your emotion is now welcome to stay – like a friend at a party.

Keep repeating this exercise with every emotion as it arises. Remember, we do not want to label these emotions as helpful or unhelpful or fight these emotions. It is enough for us to recognise they are there. They are there for a reason. They are a natural reaction. Try to make friends with these emotions and notice how they change over time.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 13C

Entering the performance arena – A confident entrance is a confident start

The way a performer enters a performance arena can have an impact on their upcoming performance. It is likely to be helpful for the performer to feel confident by looking confident. It is also helpful if the performer can approach the upcoming performance with excitement as an opportunity to display their ability.

Strategy 13C

How to enter the performance arena

Performers should think about how they will enter the performance arena before they get there. This will enable them to have an image in mind of what they will look and feel like; it is of course advantageous to have visited the venue previously. Once at the venue, the performer should try to behave in the way they have imagined. This may involve feeling relaxed, for example adopting a walk that feels relaxing, or feeling confident – which may involve them standing tall with their shoulders back.

Area 14C

Affirmation statements – Remind yourself that you can do this

Affirmations statements are designed to remind performers of their abilities and skills. They act to enhance self-belief, self-confidence and enjoyment by reminding performers of their past accomplishments and existing skills/strengths. They can be repeated whenever a performer is not feeling confident prior to a performance. They can be repeated up to the time of the performance. The repetition will encourage the performer to believe in themselves.

Strategy 14C

Example affirmation statements

Affirmation statements must be honest and accurate so that the performer believes in them.

Example achievement statements may include:

1. I got lots of positive praise last time I performed.
2. My most recent performance went very well.
3. I played this piece really well yesterday.

Example skills/strengths statements may include:

1. I really enjoy performing in front of people.
2. I can make a really good sound on this instrument.
3. I am good at communicating the feeling of the music.
4. I interact well with other musicians.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 15C

Coping with things not going to plan while performing – What to do if you make a mistake!

Performances rarely go entirely to plan, for a whole variety of reasons. For example, occasional slips or wrong notes, notes not fully sounding or being slightly out of tune or time.

Mistakes can always happen to any performer during a performance. Hopefully, teachers will repeatedly help students notice what great performers do when they make mistakes – particularly that they carry on and do not show the audience that it happened. However, no

matter how well prepared a student is, mistakes can still cause anxiety and panic whilst performing. The ability to recover quickly and return attention to playing the remainder of the piece optimally is a key psychological skill, regardless of the level of the performer. Practising for an upcoming performance should always contain some element of practice of what to do if things go wrong. This can be simulated in a practice situation where re-focussing strategies can be developed.

Strategy 15C

Refocus your mind

In order to rapidly bring your attention back to the here-and-now of your performance, you will benefit from having a word that your mind can shout if you make a mistake. This word should be short and quick for your mind to say, for example 'here', 'back' or 'now'. Saying this word, when you have made a mistake, or have lost focus for any other reason, will help re-focus your mind to move on through the remainder of your performance.

Part C – The time immediately before, during and after the performance

Area 16C

Effective post-performance evaluation – Reflecting on what the performance means for your long-term development

Evaluating any performance is a vital strategy to aid development. Performances are often very emotional times for students and evaluation must acknowledge this. For this reason, evaluation undertaken immediately following performance is unlikely to be helpful. Instead, all performers may wish to congratulate themselves on undertaking the performance irrespective of how they feel it went, and accept other people's congratulations. It is vital to acknowledge

the achievement of committing to complete a performance. Once this is done, it is best to follow the old adage of 'sleep on it'. Approaching evaluation the next day will allow the strong emotions felt during and post-performance to dissipate. This means that students will be more able to evaluate the performance for the successes and areas for improvement that will have been highlighted.

Strategy 16C(i)

Post-performance evaluation

When evaluating a performance, consideration should be paid to the following questions:

1. How do I feel about the performance?
2. What I did well. Why do I think this?
3. What I could have done better. Why do I think this?
4. What do I now need to do to help me develop and grow as a musician?

Strategy 16C(ii)

The rubbish bin

Sometimes, students struggle to move beyond a focus on what they did not do well during a performance. Their attention and thoughts will often relive moments they feel they failed during the previous performance, no matter how small and insignificant these things were. If this happens, a good way of dealing with this is to ask the student to write down all the things they didn't do well on post-it notes. Once they have done this, read them out with the student. Once you have done that, rip up the post-it notes and throw them in the bin. Those events are now in the past and students can focus on the lessons that can be learned from the performance to help future development.

About the authors

Gregory Daubney (MSc MBPsS)

has worked extensively across performance psychology domains since 2008, establishing Winning Essence in 2013. He has developed a thorough understanding of the psychological impact of performance on individuals and teams, with a particular interest and specialism in sport and other performance settings. Greg has also been involved in evaluating the psychological impacts of music-based interventions for young people in mental health settings. Greg's work is informed by wide-ranging evidence and his workshops over several years have enabled him to successfully translate complex theoretical ideas into applied, practical strategies that performers at all levels can develop to achieve optimal performance. Greg regularly writes about the ways individuals and groups can successfully embed psychological skills in order to maintain a healthy approach to skill acquisition, development and performance improvement.

Dr Alison Daubney (PhD)

works across music education in formal and non-formal settings. She is a qualified teacher and mentor, and has extensive experience working across all age phases from pre-school to postgraduate.

As a researcher, Ally has been involved in projects considering the health and wellbeing of young musicians in and out of school, including those in a diverse range of challenging circumstances and in mental health settings. Since 2009 Ally has worked extensively with the University of Cambridge International Examinations on international curriculum and assessment development. She works part-time as a freelance researcher, curriculum developer and trainer, complementing her work in music education at the University of Sussex. Ally has worked with the ISM on many aspects of music education since 2008 and regularly runs professional development courses on behalf of the ISM Trust for music teachers and practitioners working in a variety of settings.

The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM)

The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) is the UK's professional body for musicians and a leading subject association for music. Set up in 1882, it serves to promote the importance of music and protect the rights of those working within music.

We have approximately 8,000 members working in a variety of roles and areas of the music profession, including music educators working in all different settings; classroom teachers, peripatetic instrumental and vocal teachers, private teachers, lecturers, and music education hub and service staff.

Through our membership and wider networks, we support teachers, school leaders, higher education, Government and the whole music education community in delivering high quality music education for all and in championing the importance and value of music education.

The ISM Trust

The ISM Trust has been created with the clear purpose to ensure that we live in a society that values and supports the power of music and music education. The ISM Trust offers invaluable support, guidance, knowledge and encouragement to musicians and the greater music community in order that music continues to be a strong and developing force within our society.

We promote the value of music to society through research papers and information, which will continue to show the unique benefits that music brings to our world, be they economic, educational or in terms of health and wellbeing.

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